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Voices of Administrators Serving Latino Communities: A Multisite Video-Cued Ethnography

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Voices of Administrators Serving Latino Communities: A Multisite Video-Cued Ethnography

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Dedication

To Luchis, Chico, and Isa (El Ratón). For sacrificing so much mommy time so that I could fulfill my dream.

To the most supportive and loving parents any child could wish for. Mom, you have been my biggest cheerleader, always reminding me that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. To my research assistant (Dad), you are, in my mind, the smartest man in the world and my hero.

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Voices of Administrators Serving Latino Communities: A Multisite Video-Cued Ethnography

by

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The purpose of this ethnographic study was to better understand how administrators characterize high-quality early learning classrooms predominantly serving Latino/a and Latino/a immigrant students. The study was guided by a single research question: How do school and district administrators serving Latino immigrant communities describe how young children should learn in early grades (Pre-kindergarten-third)? The study drew from two theoretical perspectives: socio-cultural and politics of education. I relied on the work of Gee's cultural models and storylines, Bakhtin's dialogism and heteroglassia, and Gutierrez and Rogoff repertoires of practice to help me understand the participants' answers to my research question. I also used a political perspective as an alternative of seeing, interpreting, and explaining what goes on in an [educational] organization (Iannaccone, 1991). I relied on the logic of action as a focal point to understand the answers given by the participants to my research question. This study was part of a larger comparative video-cued ethnographic project called the Agency and Young Children Project. The research design for this study followed the methodology used by Joe Tobin and colleagues in their study of Preschool in Three

Cultures and Children Crossing Borders (Tobin, Wu, Davidson, 1989; Tobin, Wu, Karasawa, 2009; Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Adair, 2013). This study used video-cued ethnography to provide a detailed, in depth description of the cultural knowledge and perspectives of a social group (Geertz, 1970). My study revealed three prominent themes related to early learning: (a) administrators' perspectives on pedagogy of early learning; (b) administrators' perspectives on learning environments of early childhood classrooms; and, (c) administrators' perspectives on influential factors on early learning classrooms.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The moment the children heard the doorknob turn, they ran to see who was at the door. "Ms. B!," half of them yelled as their tiny bodies ran over to me and wrapped themselves around my leg. "Why are you here? What is that in your hand? Why do you have an iPad?"

A'destiny pulled my arm towards the window with excitement. "Come look at the nest the mama bird made for her babies." The excitement in the room, the noise level, students flowing throughout the room, made me want to stay there all morning. But I knew that I had to go visit the other classrooms at the school.

My walk-through took me from Pre-K to kindergarten, to first grade, and so on. Every step I took into a higher grade the classrooms became quieter, and the excitement I had felt in the Pre-K class was felt less and less. My final stop was the fifth grade. The teacher was in the front, and the students were quiet and seated at their desks. A few students had their head down on their desk. As I was walking out of the classroom, Catarino looked at me with a look of despair. The sadness in his eyes was so evident, the polar opposite of A'destiny's eyes that morning. As I walked slowly back to my office I thought to myself, "Who has the power to ignite or extinguish that excitement in a child?" This led to my interest in understanding what administrators describe as the best learning environment for children.

There is considerable evidence of the positive impact that early childhood education has on the young child over all the developmental competencies and on addressing the racial and class gaps in educational achievement (Ball, 1997; Zigler,

Gilliam & Barnett, 2011; Zigler, Gilliam & Jones, 2006). Early childhood education serves as a foundation for a child's future academic and social success (Goncu, 2010), and the administrator is the best-positioned person to ensure successive years of quality teaching for each child (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Walhlstrom, 2004). While studies have emerged over the past decade about the influence of administrators in upper elementary, middle, and high school classrooms, there is a gap in the literature related to the impact of administrators in early childhood classrooms, particularly in settings serving Latino immigrant communities (Hammond, Muffs & Sciascia, 2001). The purpose of this dissertation was to uncover what administrators in schools with a high number of first generation immigrant students in urban and border cities of Texas described as the best environments and practices for young children beginning school.

Defining Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a field of education that focuses on the education of young children from birth until the age of eight (Bruce, 2011; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2013). This field primarily deals with the developmental education of students, in which they first play, discover concepts, and learn problem-solving skills (Hauser-Cram & Mitchell, 2012). Infant/toddler education is a subset of early childhood education that denotes the education of children from birth to age two. The other subset includes children from age three to eight. Early learning describes the development of children's capacity to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make sense of the world and operate effectively therein (Ball, 1997). While academic knowledge, which is a

subset of cognitive development, is a central element in early learning, it is essentially linked to other cognitive development, as well as the development of socio-emotional skills. Early learning includes a child's all around development—cognitive, social, and emotional.

In the current school environment, there is a tendency by practitioners to describe early childhood as only pre-k and kindergarten; however, organizations such as the Foundation for Child Development advocate for a more comprehensive view. The foundation encourages school leaders and practitioners to consider an effective system as one that includes a birth-through-8 continuum (Foundation for Child Development, 2016). In my dissertation, when I talk about early childhood education I am describing children in school settings from age three to grade three. I use the word early childhood education and early learning interchangeably.

Importance of this Study

Profound changes over the past several decades have produced an altered landscape for early childhood policy, service delivery, and children in the United States (Shonkoff, 2004). Research in neurobiological, behavioral, and social sciences have led to major advances in understanding the importance of early childhood education. Studies like the Pew Prekindergarten Campaign, the Abecederian Project, and The High Scope Perry Preschool Project have determined that high quality prekindergarten programs in the early childhood years, dramatically improve children's success (Watson, 2010).

In recent years, early childhood education (ECE) has increasingly become an important topic for educational leaders due to the importance of developing the necessary foundational skills that children need to have to be successful in their succeeding years of education (Heckman, 2011; Parette, Quesenberry, & Blum, 2010; Schonkoff, 2001). Providing young children with a healthy environment in which to learn and grow is not only good for their development—economists have also shown that high quality early childhood programs bring impressive returns on investment to the public. Three of the most rigorous long-term studies found a range of returns between $4 and $9 for every dollar invested in early learning programs for low-income children (Heckman, 2011).

Emerging Context of Early Childhood Education

With more than a million children the age of 4 in early childhood programs, prekindergarten has become one of the fastest growing educational segments in schools (Shue, Shore & Lambert, 2012). The current national focus on early childhood has pushed stakeholders to reflect differently on the state of early childhood education (Kagan & Reid, 2008) and particularly its role in the K-12 system. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education established the Office of Early Learning tasked with overseeing and coordinating early learning programs across the Department of Education. This was an important milestone for early childhood, the first office of its kind to be formally established in the United States Department of Education. In 2013 President Obama proposed a new federal-state partnership to provide all low- and moderate-income four-year-old children with high quality preschool (State of the Union Address, 2013). The Department of Education has since allocated dollars to states based on their share of four-

year olds from low- and moderate- income families and funds will be distributed to local school districts and other partner providers to implement the program. The president's proposal included an incentive for states to broaden participation in their public preschool program through a billion-dollar grant. The Race to the Top grant was awarded to States leading the way with ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling, and comprehensive early learning education reform. President Obama's administration also encouraged states to expand the availability of full-day kindergarten.

Investment in early childhood education is shown to prevent achievement gaps before they start, and invests from an early age in children as the most critical national resource (Gruenewald, & Reynolds, 2006; Heckman, 2009). Early experiences and the environment in which children develop in their earliest years can have a lasting impact on later success in school and life (Schonkoff, 2001). Early childhood can be recognized as the starting point in the continuum of learning from birth to baccalaureate.

The increasing emphasis and recognition of early childhood education as a mainstay of the educational continuum implies a growing presence of ECE programs in public schools. The ECE growth inherently places a large majority of Pre-K programs in public schools; thus, the involvement of district level administration in these programs is increasing. In classrooms serving significant numbers of children from Latino immigrant communities, this administrative oversight from the school and district levels is typically high (Adair, 2015). It is important to understand the role of administrators in early childhood settings because administrators play a role in the kinds of learning experiences teachers offer young children in early grade classrooms (Goldstein, 2005).

Demographic Shifts in Early Childhood Education

There has been a sharp increase in the number of Latino immigrant students beginning school in the United States. My study is focusing on Texas because it represents an accelerated version of what is happening in the United States (Shrestha & Heisler, 2011). The highest concentration of children of immigrant families is in the Southwest, particularly along the Texas-Mexico border (Mathers, 2009). Between 2000 and 2012, for example, Texas and California were the two states with the largest absolute growth of the immigrant population, each state had 1.4 million immigrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2014).

Children of immigrants are the fastest growing segnment of the child population (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008). While immigrants are 11% of the total U.S. population, children of immigrants make up 22% of the 23.4 million children under the age of 6 in the United States (Mather, 2009). By 2020, one in three children are projected to live in an immigrant family (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Policies that support early childhood education will have far-reaching impact on children of immigrants (Capps, Fix &Passel, 2002).

The majority of foreign born living in Texas are from Mexico or Latin America. Of the 1.4 million immigrants in Texas, 64% are coming from Mexico, 16% from El Salvador, and 3% from Honduras (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). With such a significant number entering into the school system, it is imperative to focus on Latino students (Batalova, Mittelstadt, Lee, & Mather, 2008). This is not just because of the increased number of children with immigrant parents but the ways in which as Portes and Rumbaut

(2001) argue, the American school system can and often does limit the mobility of many Latina/o immigrant groups (Lee, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

School Leadership in Early Childhood Education

In the field of early childhood education, there are several types of administrators. Some early childhood classrooms are under the leadership of center directors others are overseen by elementary principals or Pre-kindergarten-eight heads of schools. These administrators work in both public and private entities. The job of the center directors and principals is directly tied to the day-to-day work happening in classrooms. Administrators also include district superintendents, deputy superintendents, and curriculum specialists. These administrators, regardless of the type of setting, are charged to transmit a vision, develop guidelines, and provide leadership to the early childhood organizations.

Administrators are an important, if not critical, part of improving the educational experiences and opportunities for children of immigrants (Buysee, Castro, West & Skinner, 2005). School and district leadership are seen as having considerable responsibility for school and teaching effectiveness (Maden, 2001). The quality of school leadership is key to continued organizational learning and improvement (Datnow, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). In a meta-analysis of 27 published studies, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) concluded that a school's leadership is likely to have more positive impacts on student achievement and well-being when they are able to focus on the quality of learning, teaching, and teacher learning. The effect of an administrator in the classrooms should be considered and studied.

It is important to hear the voices of administrators as they are a pivotal piece of the education system. While this body of work articulates the importance of administration in the teaching and learning experiences of young children, there is little we understand in the field of early childhood education about the role of school and district administrators, and there is little we understand in the field of educational administration about early childhood educational practices.

We know that Latina/o children of immigrants are one of the fastest groups of children entering public schooling contexts in the early grades, PreK-3; thus, it makes sense to understand how administrators think and conceptualize high quality early learning and to understand how administrators see their role in providing learning experiences for young Latino children of immigrants.

The Need to Focus on Administrators in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education has begun to get the attention of policymakers at all levels (Kagan & Reid, 2008). Yet it is still unclear what the early grades should be in the context of testing pressures and comprehensive school reform efforts. As academic pressures from upper standardized testing grades have dramatically increased, teachers of early grades are moving from constructivist models to academic development models (Helms, 2008; NAEYC, 2009). This move has created conflict.

First there is a point of conflict between teachers and administrators regarding their belief systems about teaching, learning and classroom organization, not simply as a two-way teacher/principal issue, but generated by strong pressure from district and state administrators to perform to standards created by the state (Darling-Hammond, 2012;

Garcia & Frede, 2010; Salinas & Reidel, 2007). The standard-based system that is now being pushed down on early childhood defines readiness as a particular set of learning experiences that children should engage in before entering kindergarten (Brown, 2007). The demands from distant administrators (those directly not involved in the day-to-day practice) to do well on paper-pencil tests lead to rigid and inappropriate standards for children which move into a direction of stripping away the student's enthusiasm for learning (Stipek, 2006). This also results in practitioners finding themselves adopting practices that they consider developmentally inappropriate (Brown, Weber & Yoon, 2014).

The academic push initiated with a Nation at Risk (Finn, 1983) and the reforming act of No Child Left Behind emphasized a curriculum focused on academic skills, like literacy and numeracy. The Bush administration even went so far as wanting to change Head Start from a comprehensive intervention program into a literacy program (Raver & Ziegler, 2004). The division has been clearly drawn between academic pursuits and a whole child approach.

Unfortunately, the pressure that standardization has put on preschool educators to teach academic skills has the potential of doing more harm than good by promoting educational practices that undermine children (Stipek, 2006). It could also do harm by reducing attention to other cognitive abilities that are not typically tested in state assessments, such as the development of critical, analytic, and creative thinking and reasoning skills (Shonkoff, 2000). In their book, From Neurons to Neighborhoods,

Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) conclude that enhancing social and emotional development is just as important as the components that enhance linguistic and cognitive competence.

Finally, a greater emphasis on academic skills in preschool would come at the cost of attention to other cognitive skills and nonacademic dimensions of development that are critical for success in life as well as in school, including social competence, behavioral self-regulation, and physical and emotional well-being. All these are dimensions that students will need not just for school, but to succeed in life. It is the administrators who are tasked with making decisions that impact directly or indirectly what happens in a classroom. The effect of an administrator in the classrooms should be considered and studied. It is important to hear the voices of the administrators as they are a pivotal piece of the education system.

Research Question

The question that frames my study is: How do school and district administrators serving Latino immigrant communities describe how young children should learn in early grades (Pre-kindergarten-third)?

Utilizing Ethnography to Answer the Research Question

This study utilizes the ethnographic method and specifically a video-cued ethnographic methodology (Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009) that positions administrators as a kind of *cultural group*, a group where they have shared meanings and expectations. This work is not just reporting details of their experiences or thoughts but is an attempt to generate understandings of culture through the representation of the

administrators' "insider point of view." As part of this method administrators watched a film of a first- grade classroom and then shared their responses to the practices, activities, and environment of the classroom. They were asked to compare the classroom dynamics in the film with what they considered to be high-quality classrooms at their schools or in their districts. The film served as a stimulus for conversation and as a mechanism to compare ideas across sites and participants. Participants' answers were coded to identify common themes.

I drew from two theoretical perspectives: *socio-cultural theory* and *politics of education* to understand how administrators describe high quality early learning. In choosing a socio-cultural perspective, I relied on the work of Gee's (2014) *cultural models* and *storylines*, Bakhtin's *dialogism* and *heteroglassia*, and Gutierrez and Rogoff's (2003) *repertoires of practice* to help me understand the participants' answers to my research question. I also used a *political perspective* as an alternative of seeing, interpreting, and explaining what goes on in an [educational] organization (Iannaccone, 1991). I relied on the *logic of action* (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993) as a focal point to understand the answers given by the participants to my research question.

Overview of the Study

Chapter One provides an overview of the study, the purpose of the study, and the research question. In Chapter Two, I present a literature review exploring how administrators are part of the literature within the field of early childhood as well as to articulate how early childhood education has been positioned in the administration and

educational leadership literature. Chapter Three includes the theoretical framework and the methodology used to organize, interpret and analyze the data.

Chapter Four and Five includes the administrators' perspectives regarding high quality pedagogical practices and learning environments in early childhood classrooms. The findings were consistent with the prevailing conceptual framework of the National Association of Elementary School Principals and revealed an optimistic and homogeneous point of view about best pedagogy practices in high quality early childhood classroom. There is clearly a nuance between what administrators describe as high quality early learning and the actual practice. Their responses reflect the dominance of *cultural free notion of best practices* (Adair, 2009).

Chapter Six includes the external factors that influence the early childhood classroom. Two major findings emerged from their interviews, the influence they have on the classrooms and the influence of standardization and high stakes testing on early childhood. Chapter Seven covers the conclusions, my reflections, and the implications of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter explores the place and role of administrators in the early childhood educational (ECE) environment. I review extant literature to discover what scholars and practitioners have written about administrators of ECE programs. The review surveys the landscape of ECE educational administration as it has been historically understood and how it is envisioned for current and future best practice. To begin, I discuss how administrators and administration is considered in the early childhood education literature. I look at how early childhood education is researched or attended to in the educational administration and school leadership literature. I outline key issues in early childhood education from an administrators' point of view. After a focus on early childhood education and administration, I turn to educational leadership literature to review styles of leadership in administration and how these styles might affect how participants in my study see and even affect young children's early grade learning experiences. Finally, I discuss how administrators influence and/or shape early childhood classrooms and what recent research has demonstrated about their influence on early childhood educational practices at the school level. The literature review contextualizes the research question: How do school and district administrators serving Latino immigrant communities describe how young children should learn in early grades (Pre-kindergarten-third)?

The chapter is divided into five sections: (a) Literature Search Strategy; (b) What Early Childhood Education Literature Says About Administrators; (c) Challenges for

Early Childhood Education; (d) Administrator Leadership Styles; and, (e) Influence of the Administrator in the Classroom.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted a series of literature searches using electronic databases to gather relevant articles. A variety of scholarly publications were used to complete this literature review. The search engines EBSCOHost and Google Scholar were used in order to research peer-reviewed journals from the databases ERIC, ED Source, PsychINFO, Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Young Children, Contemporary Issues of ECE, Early Childhood Education Journal, Education Administration Quarterly, Education Management & Leadership, Educational Research, Urban Education, and Education Leadership. In addition, advanced search options were adjusted in order to ensure that results included only peer-reviewed journal articles and studies within the past five years. Aside from journal articles, books, research reports, and dissertations were also considered if their findings were applicable to the scope of this research study.

As for the actual search proper, the following keywords were used to search for current literature: "Early Childhood Education," "Administrator Leadership Style," "Curriculum," "Managerial," "Educational Leadership," "Issues in Early Childhood Education," and "Influence of Administrators in Early Childhood Education Classrooms." Aside from these keywords, combinations of these keywords and their synonyms were also considered in order to expand the search.

What Early Childhood Education Literature Says About Administrators

Administration of early childhood classrooms represents different perspectives and levels of leadership. Some early childhood classrooms are under the leadership of a center director, others are overseen by an elementary principal, or Pre-k-eight head of school. The job of center directors, principals, and heads of school is directly tied to the day-to-day work happening in classrooms. These administrators inform instruction, evaluate teachers, coordinate building and environment maintenance, communicate with central office, parents and the community, and are often called the building administrators. Administrators also include district superintendents, deputy superintendents and curriculum specialists. The job of this level of administrator includes among other things overseeing the operation of the schools or centers, and making decisions related to state and federal requirements. These administrators transmit a vision, develop guidelines, and provide leadership to the early childhood organizations.

Many studies have noted the strong and positive effect of educational leadership on student achievement, school culture, and other aspects of educational environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2005; Wise & Wright, 2012). While many studies have emerged over the past decade about the influence of administrators in upper elementary, middle, and high school classrooms, there is a gap in the literature regarding the impact of administrators in early childhood classrooms, particularly in settings serving Latino immigrant communities (Hammond, Muffs & Sciascia, 2001). Issues of leadership in early childhood education

are greatly underrepresented in academic literature (Wise & Wright, 2012; Bush & Crawford, 2010).

Early childhood education leadership. Leaders of early childhood centers or programs influence what happens in early childhood classrooms, regardless of whether the program is connected to an elementary campus or isolated as a stand-alone center (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs 2004). As also observed in previous studies, the authors pointed out the sparse research regarding the topic. Furthermore, most of the research was anecdotal and does not offer advice or leadership examples to administrators. Despite leadership being largely ignored in ECE literature, the authors asserted that leadership is a crucial factor in early childhood institutions. They primarily cited the growing population of early childhood learners from low socioeconomic status or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In addition, the importance of acquiring foundational learning skills became an impetus to make crucial reforms at the early childhood learning stage.

ECE leadership emphasized the role of administrators to maintain facilities and provide for smooth campus operations, as opposed to a role that would facilitate change and growth. Most ECE leaders served as taskmasters or coordinators, as opposed to being agents of significant change. As such, the authors stated that *effective* ECE administrators must constantly make themselves available to communicate with and respond to the needs of their constituents and stakeholders. They must also continually develop the skills, abilities, and knowledge of the entire staff through professional development and training. They must also be forward-thinking and goal-oriented, by

continually planning for the future of their schools, while also being aware of new developments and trends in their field.

Aubrey, Godfrey, and Harris (2012) investigated what leadership meant to ECE professionals through a qualitative, multiple case-study approach. The researchers made use of questionnaires, interviews, and in-depth video vignettes to investigate participants' experiences of leadership in their respective institutions. The results of the study indicated that participants perceived their ECE institutions to have hierarchical structures and be relatively conservative in enacting strategies.

Administrators with postgraduate degrees preferred their leaders to serve as a guide or example. These leaders acted as mentors that imparted knowledge and helped with the skills training of their constituents. The same group also favored business-oriented leaders, or those that valued financial competitiveness and had good business acumen. ECE professionals with backgrounds other than teaching preferred leaders who served as strategists. These leaders prioritized long-term planning, pro-active problem-solving, and risk-taking. Meanwhile, those that had NVQs (or National Vocational Qualification) preferred leaders who were motivators. These leaders had positive attitudes and focused on empowering their constituents. Through their findings, Aubrey, et al. (2012) concluded that a crucial task of ECE leaders is to know their constituents and effectively communicate with them. This allows them to adapt their leadership styles and skills in a way that would harness the strengths and abilities of each professional in order to achieve results.

These two studies are a review of literature on leadership in early childhood education. Both of these studies concluded that leadership in early childhood education is greatly represented. I was able to use these studies to support my dissertation.

Challenges for Early Childhood Education

Administrators face challenges when they oversee early childhood programs. The study by Buysse, Castro, West, and Skinner (2005) employed a national survey to investigate 117 administrators of ECE programs. The researchers sought to examine the particular challenges, strategies, and beliefs that these leaders had in connection to serving Latino students in their respective schools. More specifically, the common issues that were raised by these administrators were in connection to developing language skills at an early age, assessing the academic attainment of students, the involvement of parents, and how to encourage equity and diversity. According to the research findings, these educational leaders generally agreed on the importance of a child's first language, and how teachers should know how to gauge the skills of students in both English and their first language. However, there was a general lack of agreement with regards to the challenges that they faced, as well as their strategies in promoting diversity and parental involvement. Despite the results indicating a strong resolve to preserve the home language of Latino students and how it is a valuable tool to be able to learn English as a second language, the study of Buysse et al. (2005) revealed the lack of a unified plan in terms of addressing key issues in early childhood education. The researchers attributed this to a lack of knowledge of administrators in addressing the needs of early childhood learners, especially those who serve Latino students or populations with varying cultural

backgrounds. Another issue cited by the authors was that few principals were prepared to handle early childhood learners and the ECE programs, since most did not possess ECE teaching experience.

Need for leadership development in Early Childhood Education. Literature cites a need for the development of leadership programs in early childhood education, primarily by creating space for a wider variety of educational practices that focus on the needs of early learners (Jor'dan, Muñoz, Figlar, & O'Connell Rust, 2013). This can be done not only by providing opportunities for emerging educational leaders to learn, but also promoting attitudes of openness about new perspectives. These ways of thinking are in response to changing demographics and the growing recognition with regards to the importance of developing critical learning skills during early childhood. Among the specific ways leadership can be developed is through *mentorship*, in which an experienced educational leader provides support, encouragement, and expert advice to new leaders.

According to the authors, administrators who underwent mentorship programs were not only prepared for the challenges that were part of their position, but it also helped them establish their sense of self as leaders. ECE leadership can also be developed by collaborating with other administrators through research or by taking part in seminars. Through these, new leaders are able share their best practices as well as key challenges they face in their respective institutions. This provides educational leaders the opportunity to recognize emerging ECE issues, and to seek advice from individuals from different perspectives and backgrounds (Jor'dan, et al., 2013).

Studies have reported that student achievement is positively and strongly influenced by educational leadership. However, the main gap in the literature is the effects of educational leadership in early childhood classrooms (Hammond, Muffs & Sciascia, 2001). There is also a pressing need to create leadership programs that include early childhood education (Jor'dan et al., 2013), since there are only 55 self-reported ECE leadership development programs (Goffin & Janke, 2013).

Gender leadership in ECE Education. Leadership in ECE education is different from other areas of education in that it is predominantly female (Wise & Wright, 2012). This is significant because female ECE leaders experience and relate to leadership differently from male leaders or those belonging to other fields. Wise and Wright (2012) found that men tend to rely on authority and status, while women gravitated towards facilitating or accommodating others. The unique environment of ECE institutions presents an opportunity to explore leadership in a field where an overwhelming number of both leaders and followers are women. Aside from contributing knowledge, further studies can also lead to the enactment of policies.

Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) similarly discussed the gender-specific dynamics in the ECE workplace in two different contexts. The authors investigated two qualitative in depth studies in the field, one of which was conducted in Australia, while the other study was set in Iceland. This was done in order to provide cross-cultural perspectives that discuss a wide range of challenges and opportunities in the field of early childhood education, which are borne from contextual and historical differences. In analyzing the two studies, the authors found several common themes that were connected to the highly

feminized field of ECE, which included the culture of niceness, micro-political dimension, horizontal violence, and sense of equality. The culture of niceness refers to how the relatively female-dominated field of early childhood learning encourages gentleness. While this is good for a harmonious workplace, this may not be conducive for situations in which reforms or critical decisions have to be made. Another theme observed by the authors was micro-politics, which referred to how people use the power that they have in the workplace environment to influence others and protect themselves. As a result, this often leads to horizontal violence, where the stereotypically feminine environment of schools promotes a culture of 'niceness.' In particular, leaders are affected by horizontal violence, as they often conform to the demands of their subordinates when commands or reforms are not received positively. The third theme that was observed is the sense of equality, which denotes that all staff members are basically the same, regardless of their position or tenure. While this promotes a sense of solidarity, its drawbacks include groupthink and the preference for the status quo. This is particularly disadvantageous because critical thinking is stifled, and this prevents institutions from recognizing challenges and finding innovative solutions (Jor'dan et al., 2013).

Key issues in early childhood education for administration. In order to investigate how administrators' influence the ECE classroom, it is necessary to detail several key issues facing administrators in connection with early childhood education. These include pedagogical differences of the ECE classroom, the emergence of policies that focus on ECE, lack of training of ECE teachers, as well as the emergence of

culturally or linguistically diverse students. Early childhood literature points out that there are some struggles emerging for administrators in early childhood education.

Early Childhood Education pedagogical differences. The ECE classroom is the first time children are submitted to the formalized education system. While many children may have been enrolled in daycares or other similar childcare providers, enrolling in early childhood education introduces the child to the structures and practices that are part of the larger educational system. ECE begins a child's journey into formalized education; however, the pedagogy that guides an ECE is different from that which is more typically found beyond third grade. ECE is the foundational experience for developing children's psychosocial and cognitive skills and abilities.

The ECE provides a setting where children will be challenged and engaged to develop relational skills. Depending on a classroom's set-up and norms, children will be provided opportunities to learn how to relate to others, especially other students and their teachers. These relationships are not only about practicing courtesy and tolerance toward one another, but developing a mutual respect and admiration; wherein, students and teachers empathize with one another. Developing healthy relationships and attachments encourages students' excitement to want to attend school and do their best (Breeman et al., 2015; Linvill, 2014). They may have the opportunity to learn skills to resolve conflict without necessarily seeking resolution by an adult. The student's ability to self-direct conflict resolution not only creates a healthy classroom environment, but it develops within the student a skill that will serve them well throughout life (Killen, Ardilla-Ray, Barakkatz, & Wang, 2000; Vestal & Jones, 2004). The students may be provided

opportunities to learn to work with others in collaborative learning and social groups and activities. Collaborative learning can expose students to alternative ways of approaching a topic or problem, and learn to be open and considerate of alternative points of view (Gomez et al. 2011; Mi Song Kim, 2013). The opportunity for these things to happen in an ECE classroom is contingent upon having in place an administrator who sets the tone for such pedagogical practices. It presumes the ECE leader is someone who has experienced ECE focused professional development and is committed to a pedagogy different than that most typically found in the third grade and beyond environment (NAESP, 2015).

An ECE-centric pedagogy includes a curriculum that is balanced to address state and local standards, as well as a curriculum that is driven by student interests (Tarchi & Pinto, 2013). A well-developed ECE pedagogy includes a curriculum that is relevant to ECE aged children, where they can make real world connections to what is being studied in the classroom (Henderson, Sabbagh, & Woodward, 2013). The atmosphere in the classroom that the teacher creates allows students an opportunity to be in charge of their own learning. The students do not necessarily create the curriculum, but topics that they mention or are of interest to them are the centerpiece of the way in which the skills and knowledge that is intended to be developed is presented. The questions that the students ask and the things about which they are curious are taken into consideration as the teacher prepares lessons. The teacher is aware of the scope and sequence of knowledge and skills to be addressed in a given year or unit; however, the backdrop, the topic, or the

setting by which the essential knowledge and skills are presented is what defines an ECE-centric pedagogy (Boyd, 2015; Weiss, 2013).

Early Childhood Education policies. In recent years, ECE has increasingly become an important topic for educational leaders due to the importance of developing the necessary foundational skills that children need to have in order to be successful in their succeeding years of education (Heckman, 2011; Parette, Quesenberry, & Blum, 2010). ECE has also become a priority in public education policy and reforms, as policymakers begin to recognize the need to improve its various aspects (Garcia & Frede, 2010). While ECE's increasing consideration among policymakers is an indication of its importance on the educational continuum, the challenge is to balance adherence to any policy with offering a curriculum that is ECE-centric (Bauml, 2016). Among the key events in the field of ECE in recent years is the enactment of various federal and state policy implementations.

There is a stronger national push towards addressing early childhood education in both state and federal policy for public schools (Garcia & Frede, 2010; Heckman, 2011; Parette, Quesenberry, & Blum, 2010). The administration of President Barack Obama enacted the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge as part of their reforms in the education sector (McGuinn, 2011). As part of this initiative, they awarded $500 million to states with comprehensive early childhood education policies (Moullin, et al, 2011). During 2013, the Strong Start for America's Children Act was also enacted, which provided free education for children from low-income families (Kramer, Caldarella,Christensen, & Shatzer, 2010). Another key of the act includes providing

financial support for states in further developing their ECE programs, specifically through developing their curriculum and teacher training. Similar to the NCLB Act, participating states are also responsible for the achievement of their students, which is gauged based on the standards of the Strong Start for America's Children Act (Kramer, et al, 2010).

Administrators and teachers are challenged to comply with standardized curriculum promulgated by the federal, state, and local agencies. They are challenged to adapt, augment, and extend the curriculum to be ECE-centric. While it may be considered a good thing to have ECE programs recognized by the various agencies and policy makers, the implications of policy on the ECE environment and how this affects the influence of administrators of ECE presents new challenges (Neumann & Bennett, 2001; Norris, 2010).

Lack of Teacher Training. With the growing teacher accountability movement, teachers have an even greater responsibility for the academic development of all students; however, teachers are not receiving adequate training to effectuate the increased responsibility (Culp & Schmidlein, 2012; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). The learning styles and the pace by which these students learn may also vary, because it is their first exposure to formal schooling (Culp & Schmidlein, 2012). The objective of professional development is to increase teachers' growth and development to meet the needs of all students (Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). Education programs prepare teachers to address the academic needs of students, but often do not adequately prepare them to meet the particular needs of each individual child (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). ECE teachers are reliant

upon school and school district leaders to provide the professional development needed to address the unique needs of these students, which makes the administrator's job even more crucial (Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013).

Aside from the lack of training, recruiting and retaining quality teachers is also becoming more of a challenge for administrators. According to Provasnik and Dorman (2005), 50% of new teachers are leaving the profession within the first five years. According to researchers at the National Education Association (2005), teachers are leaving the profession because, among other things, they feel overwhelmed and unprepared to teach.

Culturally or Linguistically Diverse Students. Meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students requires a change of attitudes in educators and administrators regarding their need for further learning and development, as well as working towards changing the status quo (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Huffman and Hipp (2013) state that fulfilling this important objective entails quite a significant amount of learning for teachers. This is especially true as the number of English language learners attending schools in the United States has grown dramatically over the past 25 years. Moreover, according to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, English language learners represent the fastest growing segment of the school-age population (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010; Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2010). Because of this recent development, teaching English language skills to English language learners is a principal responsibility of all school staff (Hill & Flynn, 2006).

The need to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students is currently at a critical state. Quality instruction is at the forefront of education in part because of the requirement in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that students demonstrate adequate yearly progress in reading and writing. Unfortunately, despite the passage of such a bill that aims to solve academic inequality in the American school system, there are still some problems. Particularly in schools that serve relatively higher proportions of students from diverse backgrounds, this systemic failure limits the access of certain groups of students to educational opportunities in American society (Lee, 2007). Factors encountered by minority or disadvantaged students, ranging from difficulty in integrating socially to a lack of access to academic resources due to financial limitations, exacerbate this currently worsening problem (Sedibe, Feldman, & Magano, 2014). The latter is a particular concern, as Brown and DiRanna (2012) noted, "equal access to content instruction is the foundation of educational equity—it reduces gaps that lead to achievement gaps" (p. 1).

Fulfilling the intent and spirit of policy, such as No Child Left Behind, implies administrators and teachers possess beliefs and attitudes that recognize culturally and linguistically diverse students' experiences lend themselves to enriched learning. The students' diversity is not considered a limitation but an asset in their matriculation through the standardized curriculum. Unfortunately, there are administrators and teachers who believe that cultural and linguistic diversity is a limitation; such belief encourages deficit thinking. The deficit thinking paradigm suggests that students fail or are slow to progress in school because of cognitive or motivational limitations. Deficit thinking does

not consider that students who might be English language learners (ELL) or immigrants, while challenged to acculturate or assimilate, nonetheless possess the requisite intellectual capacity to succeed. ELL or immigrant students often possess a heightened ability to grasp challenging topics, since their circumstances have already challenged them to navigate complexity (Gillborn, 2010; Licona, 2013; Valencia, 1997). The challenge presented to administrators is to deny the deficit thinking paradigm, and espouse and facilitate a *culturally responsive posture*. ECE administrators will best serve culturally and linguistically diverse students through leadership that honors, engages, and supports whatever diversity is present in the school. It is not simply recognizing the diverse demographics, but encouraging and expecting that the school's culture and curriculum include daily practices mindful of a diverse community (Ford, 2010; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

What Educational Leadership Literature Says About Early Childhood Education

In the field of educational leadership, early childhood education is typically seen as preschool or prekindergarten in either public or private elementary schools. There are also early childhood centers funded by city, state, and federal governments. The policies at each of the governmental levels that has appropriated funds to grow ECE has not necessarily been matched by developing and growing educational leaders who possess the professional wherewithal for the ECE environment (Bauml, 2016; Neumann & Bennett, 2001). There is a need to increase the professional development opportunities and degree programs specific to the leadership and administration of ECE (Norris, 2010).

This subsection concentrates on the concept of ECE in the context of educational leadership literature. More specifically, this sub-section reviews studies that focus on educational leadership in the context of ECE institution and how the former affects the latter. Göncü, Main, Perone, and Tozer's (2010) study of school principals included the need to integrate educational leadership into early childhood education. This was sparked by Illinois legislation, which required school principals to include preschool/pre-k in their school leadership plans and for school leaders to better understand specific approaches for high quality ECE classrooms. However, the legislation offers no concrete steps for school leadership to learn about and from ECE experts. School leadership provided at this level was relatively vague in the legislation. In addition, previous research had also produced no concrete suggestions and principals in the study were found to be unequipped to govern ECE educational context because the administrators did not have any teaching or managerial experience in ECE (Bauml, 2016).

School administrators are unclear about what makes a high quality ECE classroom. New research emerging in school leadership, Goncu, et al. (2010), is starting to locate, from an administrator's point of view, major principles of quality early childhood education. The first of which is that ECE serves as a foundation for future academic and social success. This principle places an emphasis on the development of crucial learning and interpersonal skills during these early learning stages, which learners will undoubtedly use throughout their lives. The second principle stresses the importance of a developmental approach to curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation. Educators must always keep in mind that the development of each learner is different, and all aspects of

ECE must specifically cater to the pace of each child. The lessons, manner of instruction, and assessment methods must therefore be carefully crafted, based on the progress of each student. Finally, the psychological and sociocultural contexts of each child must be taken into account. Because the school environment is among the first significant learning experiences of students outside their home, their social-emotional development and needs should be monitored. In addition, the background of students, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse learners, should also be involved in the educational practice (Göncü, et al., 2010). Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) thus documented the importance of educational leadership in the ECE community. ECE administrators must build their capacity for leadership through both theory and practice. Not only must they immerse themselves in the technical aspects of curriculum and classroom instruction, but they must also be able to learn critical management skills necessary to put reforms into motion. Such a task is crucial in making positive improvements in early childhood education. ECE administrators are challenged to avail themselves to targeted ECE professional development, as well as become familiar with ECE best practices (Bauml, 2016; Curtis & Carter, 2005; Neumann & Bennett, 2001; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

Administrators are essentially leaders of educating not only students, but teachers and other members of their respective institutions (Hallinger, 2013; Pounder, 2011; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Educational leadership is defined by Knapp, et al. (2010) as the process by which administrators, teachers, and students take part in the commitment towards the improvement of their educational institution. These efforts are geared towards the general direction of the school and the learning of its students (Knapp, et al.,

2010). Roddy (2010) sought to explain the theory as a rapport among all the members of the school as they seek to "create opportunities for the exploration and the sharing of knowledge, influence real changes about the value of life-long learning, and create strategies designed to build and promote a shared vision."

Leadership models for Early Childhood Education. While there is limited literature of administrators in early childhood within the US context, there are international studies proposing models for early childhood education. A study by Stamopolous (2012) recognized the rapid changes that Australian education is undergoing, and thus, sparking the need for early childhood education leaders to assume their roles. The author discussed the fact that early childhood leadership is relatively unexplored in literature. ECE leaders are called to guide and progress the community through enacting reforms and ensuring satisfactory learning outcomes for early childhood learners. In particular, these entail building professional knowledge, improving teaching methods, and ensuring the maintenance of facilities within their respective institutions (Aubrey et al., 2012). The author cited tertiary educational institutions and professional organizations as guideposts, which ECE leaders can use to help manage their schools. Stamopolous (2012) proposed a leadership model for early childhood learning institutions to put into place, as a result of observing tertiary educational institutions and professional organizations. The foundation of this model includes: a) professional knowledge, b) professional identity, c) interpretative lens, and d) relational trust. Professional knowledge refers to the acquisition of skills and knowledge of early childhood educators by promoting a culture of inquiry. This means that both teachers and administrators are

continually seeking opportunities (e.g. research, seminars, forums, mentorship programs) to hone their pedagogical abilities and leadership. Professional identity entails the development of a vision by which ECE professionals strive to uphold (Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013).

Establishing goals that are in accordance to one's personal and professional character allows early childhood educators to be empowered in making a positive change in their respective institutions (Stamopolous, 2012). An interpretative lens allows ECE professionals to comprehensively assess the effects of their actions and whom they affect, which includes students, other staff, parents, families, and the community. This particular trait also enables them to see the short- and long-term effects of these actions. Finally, relational trust is the establishment of interpersonal relationships with other stakeholders (Jor'dan et al., 2013). This is crucial, because ECE leaders and professionals are able to achieve results (e.g. improved academic achievement, increased funding, and greater parental involvement) by empowering other individuals in the community (Aubrey et al., 2012).

Power and authority of leadership also play a role in what happens in ECE classrooms. In a Hong Kong based study, Ho (2012) focused on the tension between two authority figures in the education system. Local school leaders and policymakers were advocating for schools to adopt a Western stakeholder model in order to experience improvements in academic achievement, school management, and facilities. The idea also included decentralizing the ECE system so more stakeholders could be involved, including parents, and additional resources obtained by the school. ECE leaders preferred

a centralized system in which the administration has majority of the control with regards to the strategy and decisions of the school. The administrators perceived that their role as leaders required them to take full responsibility for all aspects of planning and decision-making (Stamopolous, 2012). Ho (2012) points out that the contention between school leaders and policy makers prevented them from creating a high quality ECE program in both cases. Both authorities must be able to ensure harmonious relationships, primarily through constant communication, especially since it has been established that the field of early childhood education is dynamic. They must understand their roles and responsibilities, and be in constant cooperation to ensure that the unified goal, the improvement of the schools, is achieved.

Administrator Leadership Styles. Two main types of administration styles in school leadership are curriculum focused and managerial. School administrators often specialize in one of these styles in terms of how they manage their respective schools and teachers (Simonsen & Wally, 2010). Regardless of which style a leader uses it is important to understand how teachers understand that leadership style and might respond to it. The focus of administrators should be classrooms and teachers because through teachers, administrators are able to enact changes towards the curriculum and manner of instruction of their respective schools in order to properly cater to their students (Simonsen & Wally, 2010).

The following sub-sections discuss the qualities of administrators' focus as curricular or managerial. The former places emphasis on academic standards, while the latter is on the management of the school. However Johnson and Chrispeels (2010),

argue that actually it is important for administrators to draw upon both styles in order to come up with a holistic system for early childhood education in their respective schools. School leaders need to be able to guide ECE practice, work with parents and community, order materials and balance budgets (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

Curriculum focused leaders. Curriculum-focused administrators are more likely to learn about ECE when it is in their school program (Patel, Franco, Miura, & Boyd, 2013; Wolf, 2010). These leaders focus on the learning aspects of ECE, such as the lesson plans, textbooks, and daily activities, as well as the manner by which they are taught by teachers (Patel, et al., 2013; Wolf, 2010). Curriculum-focused leaders think carefully about how to craft specific and specialized lessons for different ECE students with varying learning styles or speeds (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). They consider content and language objectives that include instructional differentiation in the classroom for both administrators and ECE teachers. This is especially important for young learners who are beginning to develop their logic and verbal skills (Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). They also consider content objectives which is the subject matter information that educators want students to know by the end of the lesson (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Haynes & Zacarian, 2010). School leaders should also consider language needed to think, speak, read, and write about the content (Wallqui & van Lier, 2010). Understanding and guiding teachers to think about content and language objectives are vital in classroom instruction for ECE students, because they highlight the 'what' and 'how' of their learning for the particular session. Defining learning objectives helps administrators and teachers effectively track student progress, which includes avoiding

repetition of specific subject matter that a student may have already tackled and mastered (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

ECE leaders also need to understand content objectives because these help identify the topics and their meanings allowing young students to evaluate what they have learned (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Haynes & Zacarian, 2010). Language objectives act as the building blocks that help students gradually understand the content (Wallqui & van Lier, 2010). Because young students in ECE programs typically learn the content and develop their verbal skills at the same time, administrators (with the help of their teachers' first-hand experiences) must carefully craft their lesson plans and activities in order to maximize the learning of their students (Wallqui & van Lier, 2010). Administrators must also carefully monitor the curriculum of their respective institutions, as this serves as the basis for the long-term lesson plan as well as the daily classroom instruction of the teachers (Wolf, 2010). A comprehensive and appropriate curriculum is also what leads to improved academic standards (Wallqui & van Lier, 2010).

Managerial administrators. Managerial administrators focus on the management of their respective schools, which include operational and administrative tasks (Peck & Reitzug, 2012). Among the most common responsibilities managerial administrators focus on are overseeing daily activities, budget management, facilities management, and human resources matters. They also commonly handle the relationship management with their various stakeholders, such as parents, staff, district school supervisors, and even donors or policymakers (Terosky, 2013). Typical work of managerial oriented administrators includes tasks like overseeing daily activities, such as staff and student

attendance, and the supervision of recess and lunch periods. These principals also attend to special events (such as school fairs, celebrations, parent-teacher conferences) or emergency events (such as disciplinary cases or school cancellations) (Terosky, 2013).

Budget management is among the most important functions that managerial administrators are accountable for (Terosky, 2013). This is due to the often-difficult process of allocating limited financial resources into the different operational activities of their respective schools. Among the biggest expenses of a school are building or acquiring as well as maintaining suitable facilities (which are expounded later on in this subsection). Schools also allocate a significant portion of the budget into the salaries of the school's employees (Kottkamp, 2011). These do not only include the teaching staff, but also maintenance personnel, food service staff, and other administrators, among others. The training and development of its staff, most especially its teachers, are also among the significant expenditures of a school (Kottkamp, 2011).

Another major responsibility of managerial administrators is facilities management, from their procurement or construction to their upkeep (Terosky, 2013). These facilities include classrooms, faculty rooms or offices, special activity areas (such as playgrounds, playrooms, libraries, and gyms, among others), and lunchrooms. Aside from these, the custodial maintenance of the entire building, in terms of cleanliness, orderliness, and safety also have to be prioritized. Also included in this responsibility are other miscellaneous services that the school provides, such as the school bus system (Terosky, 2013).

Aside from matters of financial resources and facilities, administrators also act as human resource managers (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Among their tasks is overseeing the recruitment of qualified staff members (Hidalgo, 2004). Other than hiring teachers who are competent to teach and handle the students, administrators also need to ensure that other staff members are fit to provide services and interact with the children (Fuller, Young, & Baker, 2011). This is especially crucial, because the safety and well-being of the students are the utmost priority (Hidalgo, 2004). Beyond their recruitment, the integration of staff members into the school is also among the human resources-related tasks of the administrators (Jackson & Marriott, 2012; Mueller, 2014). In ensuring that staff members are properly aligned with the school's vision of providing excellent education and service to students, administrators must properly communicate the institutions organizational values to all staff. According to Mueller (2014), a unified vision provides a guide or a standard by which all employees (whether they are teachers or custodians or lunch ladies) can accomplish their responsibilities for the betterment of the school and its students. As mentioned earlier, the training and development of staff members is also an important task. Administrators are also responsible for planning and implementing seminars or classes to ensure that their staff are constantly and consistently learning (Neumerski, 2013).

The final but most important responsibility of managerial administrators is handling their relationships with various stakeholders (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Among these stakeholders are the groups that they report to, such as district or state superintendents or other education leaders (Terosky, 2013). Aside from complying with

the academic standards that are mandated by these parties, they are also bound by the bureaucratic procedures that are involved with running an educational institution (Terosky, 2013). Aside from these, another vital relationship of administrators is with their students and their families (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). According to Pounder, Ogawa, and Adams (1995), an administrator's ability to engage with students and their families towards the improvement of their education has a positive effect on school performance. In their study, the researchers found that empowering parents to play an active role in their child's education (such as attending PTA meetings and participating in their child's school activities) had a positive effect on student achievement. In doing so, parents are able to sustain their child's classroom learning, because they are using their own homes as an extension and themselves as co-educators (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Pounder, et al, 1995). Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) also observed these similar findings in their study about the direct effect of school leadership on the learning of students themselves. The frequent and active interaction by administrators with students allows the former to observe the latter's learning needs (Leithwood, et al, 2010; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010).

Contextualizing Early Childhood Education

Prior to 2010, each state in the United States had its own curricular standards for early childhood education (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang, 2011). These standards outline what subject content students should be taught at particular grade levels. Evaluating teaching performance against state standards meant comparing the subject matter covered within a classroom, to the specific standards set by each state. In 2010,

however, the national government, through the leadership of organizations like the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers released the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) – a new set of learning goals for all students that attempts to unify the subject matter taught across all 50 of the United States (Cairn, 2012; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012; Porter et al., 2011). With the CCSS, the U.S. government attempted to create a national curriculum in order that all students within the country would generally acquire the same crucial skills and knowledge at each grade level. The CCSS, according to Cairn, and to Porter et al., is a detailed enumeration of what schools should be teaching, and what students are expected to know at each grade level in the K-12 system, for the subject areas of English (including language arts) and mathematics. Through the CCSS, the different states hope to equally prepare all students for college by teaching them the necessary knowledge and skills that will be demanded in tertiary education and beyond. Against the standards set by the CCSS, teaching behaviors and performance are now compared in various states. As of 2012, 45 of the 50 United States have adopted the CCSS (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012).

The adoption of curricular standards has drawn much criticism and debate among early childhood educators and education advocates in the United States. Much of the criticism has focused on how comprehensive the CCSS curriculum is with respect to the skills that must be learned by students at every grade level and the pressure this puts on early, (non-tested) grades classrooms. Organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children have recommended the continued incorporation of the

knowledge and experience of teachers and organizations into the development of the CCSS and its teaching standards. Because of these pressures it is more important than ever for school leaders to protect content and language objectives of early grades and to think carefully about using early child teaching approaches to achieve language and content objectives. What often happens is that school leaders have little knowledge of ECE pedagogy and curriculum and the pressure of standards pushes administrators to encourage prek-2 teachers to teach like upper grade teachers.

The Influence of Administrators on the Classroom

As a leader either at the district or school level, administrators have varying levels and types of influence. How they influence the actual early childhood classroom has a number of variables including style and perspective as outlined before. This section focuses how administrators are thought to official influence early childhood classrooms particularly around a few key early childhood classroom issues and how administrators can use their leadership to improve classroom learning in their respective schools.

What administrators should know to be supporters of early childhood practices. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals or NAESP (2008) there are six ways leaders of early childhood education can become more effective in leading their communities. *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice* provides a framework to help principals create and support connections between the worlds of birth to five and K-12 and to help them implement developmentally-appropriate teaching and learning practices to ensure successful Pre-K-3rd continuums in their schools. The six competencies are as follows:

1. Embrace the Pre-K-3 Early Learning Continuum;
2. Ensure Developmentally-Appropriate Teaching;
3. Providing Personalized Learning Environments for Young Children;
4. Use Multiple Measures of Assessment to Guide Student Learning Growth;
5. Build Professional Capacity Across the Learning Community;
6. Make Schools a Hub of Pre-K-3 Learning for Families and Communities.

In heeding these guidelines administrators of these early childhood learning communities can effectively serve the many stakeholders of these institutions, their teachers, community members, parents, and most especially their students (NAESP, 2008). Newer work in educational leadership in early childhood is pointing to the changing context of education. Principals, center directors, and other district administrators are being asked to know about teacher resources, as well as more sophisticated professional development strategies. In addition, administrators are increasingly realizing the importance of connecting with communities and parents.

Despite many distinct definitions of school leadership, there is still a lack of formality among researchers regarding its meaning (Hallinger, 2013; Pounder, 2011; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Blakesley (2011) points to the relatively imprecise definition of leadership as a reason for this inconsistency. He also cites the limited amount of literature focusing on the said topic. Gabbard (2013) claimed that the term is redundant and a possible source of confusion because educators are already understood to be leaders in their classrooms or schools. As for Johnson (2011), the role of an educational leader has become even more dynamic. Instead of the traditional instructional leader who

merely directs his or her subordinates, an educational leader must now be a "learning" one. According to Johnson (2011), a learning leader is a team player that serves, consults with, and answers the needs of the very people they lead. These do not only include their teachers and staff, but also the students and their parents.

The literature search gathered three main ways administrators could become effective education leaders: (a) promoting the use of information and communication technology (ICT); (b) enacting professional development programs; and (c) establishing professional learning communities.

The use of information and communication technology. According to Hedberg (2011), our classrooms have been permanently altered by the proliferation of technology in the past decade. Technology has become an ever-present tool for teachers and students (Brown & Adler, 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act (2002), which revised the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, provides incentives to use technology in the education of students and their teachers. Technology plays a vital role in assisting students with disabilities to gain access to the general education curriculum; technology engages the learner in a deeper way, and encourages critical thinking, it can make learning much more desirable and attainable to the learner (Cole, 2009).

The question that arises at this point is no matter what the technology may be, are the teachers in the schools of the United States sufficiently well trained to accept and acknowledge this technology, so that it may be put to its best use when teaching students? In the opinion of Kleiman (2000), from the Center for Professional Online Education at the Education Development Center, clear-eyed commitment to using the available

technology is important in the efforts being made to meet central educational goals. This would enable educators to obtain a clear cut and a substantial return on the huge investments being made for the introduction of technology into schools in the United States, today. At the same time, teachers must be careful and aware of the fact that the extremely rapid influx of high technology in schools is in fact running much ahead of the basic educational vision, and that one would have to be very careful if one were to avoid the pitfalls that may arise due to this factor (Kleiman, 2000).

For the most part, teachers who are responsible for bringing technology that would help and aid the students in their learning, such as the Internet and multimedia computers into schools, are hardly trained or equipped to deal with these advancements; as a result, none of these technological advances are being made use of in an adequate and appropriate manner. Computers are being used in the fringes of classroom work, as an ancillary to the learning activity at hand, not integrated as a regular learning aide (Kleinman, 2000). Teachers often lack the basic software necessary to support the goals of the curriculum, and this means that although there is good software available for educational purposes, if one were not able to recognize them and integrate them into one's curriculum, then the technology would be not be optimized. In a similar manner, technical support is often not available, and if there were a problem, the teacher would have to wait for a long while before a technician would address it, and this means that there would be long delays.

If the teacher were to be better trained, on the other hand, there would be a better usage of the technology available today (Aubrey et al., 2012). They would know exactly

what to do when the technology was to break down for some reason or the other, and know how to make use of the contingency plans if there was a failure (Jor'dan et al., 2013). Every teacher would be well trained and well equipped at some future date to implement the technology available today into her classrooms, and integrate it into her teaching methods. Assistance may be provided to them in their search for the best software for teaching, and for technology based lesson plans, and for online teaching material. It is to be hoped that there will be a time in the very near future when a teacher would be as comfortable using high technology, as she is using the black board and chalk (Mambretti, 1999).

Some of the challenges that still face teachers and students in implementing the technology available to them in schools today are quite simple, and can be solved with some creative thinking (Stamopolous, 2012). For example, the equipment may not have been placed in an easily accessible location, or the teachers may be quite unfamiliar with the hardware and the software needed for their purpose (Buysse et al., 2005). They may even lack the motivation necessary to learn new skills, or the technical support may not become available when it is needed or any other reason. The solutions for all these challenges may be simple. When they are discovered, that would be the time when the best use of the available technology would be made. Although it is a fact that technology is today easily available in plenty of schools, it is not being used properly, and it is a must that all schools develop a strategy that would allow its students and teachers alike to make use of the facilities that have been provided to them (Rodriguez & Knuth, 2000).

These are today only some of the technological resources and tools available today for the purpose of furthering and improving education in all schools across the United States of America. It must be remembered that any change in the classroom technique will, in general, be correlated to changes in various other aspects of education as well, and this would include the measurement of student achievement (Stamopolous, 2012). Therefore, when a new technology is introduced into a classroom, the student, as well as the teachers would have to relate to it. Furthermore, the techniques used to study would change dramatically so that the student would have a better grasp of the subject that he is studying, and the teacher would have a better knowledge of the subject (Rappaport, 2011).

Professional development. Professional development has been a part of the teaching profession for many years and includes some form of instructional coaching from a peer or administrator (Marsh et al., 2008). The importance of teachers having regular and consistent access to quality professional development opportunities has increased drastically in the current era of teacher accountability (Peters & Oliver, 2009). Teacher effectiveness measures have also been implemented in schools across the country in order to evaluate teacher accountability effectively (Graham & Perin, 2007). Additionally, it is important that the increased professional development opportunities be specific to teacher needs in order to sustain teacher development and growth (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Recently, there has been an even greater urgency as school districts create frameworks to assess teacher effectiveness (Kupermintz, 2003; Kress, Zechmann, &

Schmitten, 2011). The increased emphasis on teacher accountability has caused school districts to incorporate various instructional supports, such as professional development programs that help teachers improve their skills through classroom coaching (BambrickSantoyo, 2012; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). These skills include classroom management, evaluation methods that can be used with their students, as well as strategies to support students to become better communicators (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). More importantly, these skills can also address the need of having teachers who are more prepared to handle students with possible learning disadvantages, limitations, or problems (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Young students can benefit from teachers who are better trained to handle their unique needs, because these teachers know how to communicate and instruct effectively (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009).

Professional development opportunities that consist of instructional coaching by peers and evaluators, participation in professional learning communities, professional book studies with peers, and professional development programs at school sites represent the type of training that will prepare teachers' instructional support wherewithal (Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Gleason & Gerzon, 2013; Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbell Jones, 2013). The traditional model of professional development for teachers typically consists of teachers attending workshops and seminars where a facilitator provides information about new or innovative instructional strategies (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; City et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009). Teachers are the most valuable resource in schools, as researchers have found that student achievement is directly related to teacher

knowledge and experience (Darling-Hammond, 2000). As such, it is important for schools to have educators who engage in professional development that develops their skills. Once teachers become better trained, they are more equipped with the knowledge and abilities to respond to students with specialized needs (such as culturally and linguistically diverse learners), they are then able to help them perform better academically (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Professional learning communities. There are five disciplines of a learning organization, and systems thinking is the cornerstone of a learning organization (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). Hord, Roussin, and Sommers (2009) noted five dimensions of professional learning communities are (a) shared and supportive leadership, (b) shared vision and values, (c) collective learning and application, (d) supportive conditions (collegial relationships and structures), and (e) shared personal practice. Shared and supportive leadership ensures that each person works alongside other members of the organization to meet objectives (Hord, Roussin, & Sommers, 2009). Shared vision and values provide a common goal, which the organization works to achieve or uses as motivation, while collective learning and application emphasizes that the members develop their skills together and act as one unit (Hord, Roussin, & Sommers, 2009). Supportive conditions create a working environment that makes it easy, effective, and efficient for all to work. The fifth dimension of a professional learning community, shared personal practice, basically encourages each member to voice and express their ideas or suggestions (Hord, Roussin, & Sommers, 2009).

Professional learning communities share a common concern or area of interest that provides the community with a unique identity and involves engaging in collaborative activities and discussions and a shared practice that includes developing strategies for solving problems (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012). They support educator learning through professional development that is collaborative, data driven, and peer facilitated. Having peers facilitate the process creates buy-in from the communities (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012). Professional learning communities are not an initiative but rather a school-wide philosophical framework (Gamble, 2008; Maliszewski, Tong, Chiu, & Huh, 2008). Systems thinking is a body of knowledge and tools that helps school leaders identify patterns and look for ways to address those patterns (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska 2004). Hord, Roussin, and Sommers (2009) described conditions for the success of professional learning communities, which includes weekly meetings of grade-level or subject matter teams whose members focus on their students' needs, content curriculum, and instructional practices to increase student achievement.

Summary

Early Childhood Education has become a higher priority in public education policy and reforms as policymakers begin to recognize the need to improve its various aspects (Garcia & Frede, 2010). Among the most important aspects of early childhood education reform are the curriculum and teacher management (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Ravitch, 2011). As academic pressures from upper standardized testing grades have dramatically increased, teachers of early grades are moving from constructivist models to academic development models (NAEYC, 2009; Helms, 2008).

School administrators often specialize in either curriculum or management styles in terms of how they manage their respective schools and teachers (Simonsen & Wally, 2010). There are curriculum-focused administrators, who are learning imperative (Patel, Franco, Miura, & Boyd, 2013; Wolf, 2010). These leaders focus on the learning aspects of ECE, such as the lesson plans, textbooks, and daily activities, among others (Patel, et al., 2013; Wolf, 2010). In contrast, managerial administrators focus on the operational aspects of running an early childhood learning community (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2011). These include teacher training and development, professional learning initiatives, and the general operational processes on how the teachers implement the curriculum (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2011). While these two styles have their own distinct roles in an educational institution, it is still important for administrators to draw on both in order to come up with a holistic system for ECE in their respective schools (Vincent & Focht, 2011). Doing so allows administrators, teachers, and the school to improve both the theory and practice aspects of education (Vincent & Focht, 2011).

Issues of leadership in early childhood education are greatly underrepresented in academic literature (Bush & Crawford, 2010). However, the scarce literature that does address the topic note several key problems; as teachers who lack training, the emergence of culturally and linguistically diverse students, as well as the increase in academic pressures from upper standardized testing grades (NAEYC, 2009; Helms, 2008). In order to provide a significantly positive influence in their respective schools, administrators need to be able to lead and manage people effectively (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). Administrators thus need to make use of several leadership strategies in order to become

effective educational leaders. The impetus for change remains at the hands of administrators, as they are the leaders of their schools.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Trying to better understand how school and district administrators describe high quality practices in early childhood classrooms serving Latino immigrant students, I called upon a theoretical stance that valued the administrators as experts on their own approach to direct their organization (Varence & McDermot, 1998). The administrators in my study are treated as members of a shared culture who are in the tradition of ethnography, experts of their own lives (Adair, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

I draw from two theoretical perspectives: *socio-cultural* and *politics of education* to understand how administrators describe high quality early learning. In choosing a socio-cultural perspective, I move beyond the individual and try instead to understand a group within the context of schools. From a socio-cultural perspective, the administrators' activities involve social participation and interaction. I relied on the work of Gee's cultural models and storylines, Bakhtin's *dialogism* and *heteroglassia*, and Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) *repertoires of practice* to help me understand the participants' answers to my research question. I will also use a political perspective as an alternative of seeing, interpreting, and explaining what goes on in an [educational] organization (Iannaccone, 1991). I relied on the logic of action as a focal point to understand the answers given by the participants to my research question.

There is little we understand in the field of early childhood education about the role of school and district administrators, and there is little we understand in the field of educational administration about early childhood educational practices. As Latina/o

children of immigrants are one of the fastest groups of children entering public schooling contexts in the early grades, PreK-3, it is important to understand how administrators describe high quality early learning specifically when it comes to Latina/o children of immigrants.

Socio-Cultural Perspective

A socio-cultural perspective means pursuing a deeper understanding of why humans behave the way they do within certain types of contexts. The central thesis is that culture shapes mind; that it provides us with a toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds, but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers (Bruner, 1996). Sociocultural approaches were first systematized and applied by L. S. Vygotsky and his collaborators in Russia in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. "Sociocultural approaches are based on the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbolic systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development" (Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). At a time when psychologists were intent on developing simple explanations of human behavior, Vygotsky developed a rich, multifaceted theory through which he examined a range of subjects including the psychology of art, language and thought, and learning and development (Steiner & Mahn, 1996). However, his work was suppressed for 20 years and did not become accessible again until the late fifties and early sixties. Since then, sociocultural approaches have gained increasing recognition and have been further developed by scholars in over a dozen countries (Steiner & Mahn, 1996). The expansions

and interpretations in the last 25 years have led to diverse perspectives on sociocultural theory.

As Vygotsky struggled to understand the influence of history, culture, and context on human development, both individually and in groups, he shifted away from the study of the individual and towards the study of the social group and its cultural history highlights the role of social and material context in understanding how knowledge is both constructed and displayed (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2002). Modern refinements have helped make Vygotskian principles relevant to the framing of diverse social problems, not apparent through Vygotsky's primarily experiments.

Culture is learned and not biologically inherited (McCurdy, Spradley & Shandy, 1972). Culture is shared, it is social knowledge, not knowledge unique to an individual. People use their cultural knowledge to interpret experience but also use their experience to enrich their culture. Culture, then, though itself man-made, both forms and makes possible the workings of distinctively human minds. Learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources (Bruner, 1997).

Interactions give meaning. It is primarily by interacting with others that people find out how they conceive the world. The "intersubjectivity" is the human ability to understand the minds of others through language, gestures, or other means. In this study it is not just the words that make this possible, but my capacity to grasp the role of the settings in which words, acts, and gestures occur.

Cultural Models or Storylines. Gee (2014) defines the term of cultural models as storylines shared by people belonging to specific or cultural groups (De Andrade, 1995; De Andrade & Strauss 1992; Holland & Quinn, 1987). These cultural models explain why words have the situated meaning they do and through the interviews I will take each as a piece of puzzle to understand the "big picture" and help organize the thinking and social practices of a sociocultural group, how people represent their goals, stances, and ideas and in turn construct their world (Gee, 2014). These cultural models or storylines mediated by how administrators are influenced or create meaning through their experiences and interaction and the patterns they live every day. How people talk about an idea creates a storyline that bonds a group like administrators together.

Only through understanding the complex set of factors that influence the actions of administrators can I fully understand and give a meaning to the answers they provide me. Gee (2014) calls this, *cultural models,* which are story lines. They are families of connected images, like a mental movie or informal theories shared by people belonging to a specific social or cultural group (De Andrade, 1995; DeAndrade & Strauss, 1992; Gee, 2014; Holland & Queen, 1987). Cultural models explain relative to the standard of the group why words have the various situated meanings they do (Gee, 2014).

Dialogism and Heteroglossia. Bakhtin's theory of the socio-cultural practice of language (Burke, 2004), and his use of heteroglossia, helps to understand the different meanings given to administrators' utterances. Dialogism is an epistemological approach to discourse that focuses on the way that humans make use of language (Holquist, 1990; Luzwik, 2004). Independently of ethical considerations, I used dialogism as an

organizing interpretative principle. As such, it offers a broad definition of communication and offered insights into human interactions as a foundation of comprehension, meaning, and interpretation (Luzwik, 2004).

Administrators, the focal group of this study, act in different contexts. They face many realities that coexist in their experience of the world; associated to this different context, there are multiple possibilities and interpretations of their answers. Bakhtin sensitizes us to the concept of multiple possibilities and interpretations in any social situation as he defines heteroglossia, that means, different speech-ness. (Burke, 2004; Dutta-Berman & Doyle, 2001).

Dialogic nature of discourse directs attention to the socially situated, locally contingent, nature of discourse (Luzwik, 2004). How we see the world depends on how we approach it, the lens used by the researcher in locating and describing the practice of the world is fundamental to how the world is constructed (Bakhtin, 1981; Cheney, 2000; Dutta-Berkman and Doyle, 2001).

Dialogism takes for granted that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else. The mind is structured so the world is perceived according to its contrast (Holquist, 1990). We engage in an inquiry process guided by the theoretical stance and methodological approach commensurate with the logic of inquiry used by Bahktin (Skukauskaite & Green, 2004).

Socio-cultural influences on administrators. In using a socio-cultural perspective, I am trying to understand the administrators' participation in the practices of administration that help them make sense of how they see high quality early childhood

education. This is referred as the *repertoires of practice*, a person's history of involvement in practices (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). In other words, the concept of *repertoires of practice* refers to peoples' ways of engaging in activities stemming from their participation in a range of cultural practices (Pacheco & Gutierrez, 2009). This perspective requires attention to people's history of engagement in practices of the cultural community of which they are part. For example: the political atmosphere of the organization, the leadership program through which the administrator obtained their training, the professional development the administrator has participated in, and the background of the administrator.

While this study is not about systems, but rather a group that is powerful within a system it can be helpful to draw upon aspects of cultural-historical theory that the ideas about something (in this case ECE) are often shaped by much more than ECE itself. It also includes dominant ideas about development, children, political pressures, U.S. cultural value of independence and achievement. Human activity is mediated by ideas that are created and transformed during the development of the activity itself and carry with them a particular culture –historical remains from their development being an accumulation and transmission of social knowledge, that influences the nature of external behavior and also the mental functioning of a group (Engenstrom, Miettinen & Punamaki, 1999).

Political perspective. Everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macro-politic and micro-politic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Iannaccone (1975) indicated that school administrators are necessary political actors both in the education

political system (micro-politics/within district) and larger political system (macro-politics/state and federal policy). They are political actors in the education system because they are instrumental in determining the organizational structures or the micro-processes within the schools. Micropolitics helps us understand the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in schools (Blasé, 1991). On the micro-process within the schools the interactions that administrators have with teachers can either augment or erode teacher efficacy, kindle or curb their willingness to participate in decisions, direct or divert attention to the instructional component of schools, contribute to or detract from satisfaction with work and commitment to the organization (Chapman & Boyd, 1984).

They are also actors in the larger political system because they seek to be influential in entities outside of the school, like in the community, school boards, parents, and state and federal government but they are also influenced by these stakeholders. My study will focus on how practicing administrators think about early childhood education while operating within larger systems and structures connected to their positioning (Blasé, 1991).

On the macro-process, the activity of administrators implies the interaction with parents and community in formal meeting such as program specific advisory committees, school-wide advisory councils and school based governing boards (Malen,1994). Administrators also interact with the state and federal government as to how they think early childhood practices should be. I draw on the tradition of educational politics (e.g., Cibulka, Reed, & Wong, 1992; Peterson, 1976; Wirt & Kirst, 1982) that focuses on the

school district as an arena of political activity (e.g., Peterson, 1976; Wirt & Kirst, 1982). I looked at school administrations both from the micro-political and macro-political approach (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993) and I centered my analysis on the concept of logic of action as the focal point which I use from the political perspective to try to understand how administrators answered my research questions.

Logic of action may be seen as the implicit (that is often unstated) relationship between means and goals that is assumed by actors in organizations (Karpik, 1978 pg. 59). Logic of action can be manifested as broad ideologies (Bacharach, Masters & Mundell, 1993). This conceptual framework, applied to education, allows us to understand the two lines of thinking behind the current controversy between the cognitive abilities and the whole child approach (Ziegler, 2006).

Ideologically, this controversy shows a divergent vision of the primary purpose of schooling: one defined by the demands of the open market/neoliberal values associated with competitiveness (Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015) the other defined by distributed justice and the value of equity and access to opportunity (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). Within the open-market/neoliberal vision, the goals are targeted towards academic skills and knowledge, which is a subset of the cognitive abilities (Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Salinas & Reidel, 2007). The means to reach these goals are achieved through standardization. The goals of the policy of the open market vision are to achieve higher academic test scores and this can be reached through supervision and accountability. (Salinas & Reidel, 2007; Bacharach & Mundell, 1993).

Within the distributed justice vision, the goals are targeted towards equity in learning. The means to reach these goals are achieved through learning participation that is student centered. The goals of the policy of the distributed justice is the development of cognitive and socio-emotional skills. This can be reached though viewing and developing the whole child. (Ziegler, 2006; Schonkoff, Bacharach & Mundell, 1993).

By viewing the political process, micro and macro politics that school administrators are subject to, using the lens of logical action (Bacharat & Mundell, 1987) opens the opportunity to better understand the current debate and controversies in early childhood between an academic emphasis versus the whole child approach (Ziegler, 2006). Blasé (1991 c) suggests that administrators should try to develop a deep awareness of self, especially political values and purposes, as well as the strategies they use to influence individuals and groups. By using a political lens in my study, it allows present practicing administrators and scholars alike with fresh and provocative ways to think about human behavior in schools (Blasé, 1991).

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of how administrators view high quality early childhood classrooms. This study was part of a larger comparative video-cued ethnographic project called the Agency and Young Children Project. The research design for this study followed the methodology used by Joe Tobin and colleagues in their study of Preschool in Three Cultures and Children Crossing Borders (Tobin, Wu, Davidson, 1989; Tobin, Wu, Karasawa, 2009; Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Adair, 2013).

This study used video-cued ethnography to provide a detailed, in depth description of the cultural knowledge and perspectives of a social group (Geertz, 1970). Traditionally, ethnography began with an outsider trying to understand the view and logic of insiders of a group (Malinowski, 1922). Over time this has changed and now "insider" anthropologists are turning educational ethnography into a powerful research instrument in the exploration of new horizons with new sets of inquiry (Zou & Trueba, 2009; Atkinson & Delamont, 2008, Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Ethnography allows the researcher to think simultaneously about space and time and to place the way administrators think about early childhood practices in a historical and cultural context (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009).

Elements of ethnography. Ethnography attempts to describe culture or aspects of culture (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing, 2003). The complex nature and formal approach of acquiring cultural knowledge, known as ethnography, required a well-inspected definition. In this study, it was not my position to discover or define culture; rather I uncovered and let culture be defined by those within it, the administrators. An appropriate description of ethnographic research is a systematic way of making sense of culture, involving the study of groups and people as they go about their daily life (Emerson et al., 2011).

To understand what ethnography is, one must understand what ethnography is about. It is important to understand the meaning of culture because researchers gain knowledge of meaning within culture. Culture embraces what people do, what people know, and things that people make and use (Spradley, 1980). Culture is made up of the

concepts, beliefs, and principles of action and organization that an ethnographer has found could be attributed successfully to the members of the group (Goodenough, 1976). Ethnography provides the reader with a detailed picture of what's going on, from the perspective of a cultural framework (Bogdan & Bilkden, 2007). Ethnographers attempt to elicit the insider's or *emic* perspective of reality in the field. Culture is not singular and it is not static and the beliefs and ideas change over time (Pacheco & Gutierrez, 2010).

Ethnography required the researcher to confront their positionality, privilege, and ideologies. Doing so deepens the researcher's own understanding of his or her motivations, values, and aims as well as enabling those evaluating the research to better situate the design and findings. As an administrator, myself, and a Latina, I could be considered an insider and unable to elicit rich, detailed answers because participants would assume that I already know the answers. This method helped position myself as an outsider so that participants shared their ideas with me about early childhood education.

Ethnography requires the production of detailed narrative with thick description. Ethnography has "the capacity to open up a world to the reader through thick, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places" (Patton, 2002). Denzin (2011) describes thick description in the following manner:

> A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It presents detail, context and emotion, and the web of social relationship that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. In thick

description, the voice, feelings, actions, and meaning of interacting individuals are heard.

Multivocal, video-cued ethnography. The specific type of ethnography I used for this study of administrators and their ideas about early childhood practices is multivocal, video cued, ethnography. Multivocal ethnography used film as a tool to invite discussion, instead of standard interview questions. Typically, a video is filmed of an early childhood classroom capturing a typical day in an early childhood setting. The video is shown to the focus group to invite the participants to react to the video. Conversations reflect what they think about the classroom, including what they like and don't like. The discussion serves as data to be analyzed. Analysis is meant to find patterns of similarities and differences across the group being studied. By showing the same video to all the administrator participants, I collected comparable data that helped me uncover similarities and differences in their answers. Through careful analysis, I looked for patterns of how administrators speak about the early childhood practices in the film and what kinds of connections and ideas they shared about their own schools and districts.

The use of multivocal ethnography is modeled after the research design developed by Joseph Tobin and colleagues for the Preschool in Three Cultures studies as well as the newest project, Children Crossing Borders (See Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009; Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1989; Adair & Pastori, 2011). In the Preschool in Three Cultures study Tobin and colleagues videotaped pre-schools in China, Japan, and the US. They edited the films and showed the videos to educators in each country. Educators watched the

videos and explained their own countries' practices. They then watched the other countries and responded about what they liked and didn't like. What results is a conversation of early childhood educators in the three countries, discussing the same set of videos. One of the goals of the project was to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between insiders and outsiders, practitioners and researchers (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989).

Tobin et al. developed the idea from the work of anthropologist Linda Connor and ethnographic filmmaker Asch and Asch (Connor, Asch, & Asch, 1986). Tobin was also influence by the filmmaker, A. Kurosawa (1951). His film, Hakuchi is about an encounter between three people on a path in the forest. The film shows how the three people describe their experience form their point of view resulting in three different stories. Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa used this film as inspiration for making a film and having a lot of people from a group interpret the film and help him make sense of it, instead of relying on only his own interpretation. As Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa write, "The video tapes are not the data; rather, they are cues, stimuli, topics for discussion, interviewing tools" (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009, p. 7).

In traditional ethnographic fieldwork, the anthropologist spends a considerable amount of time observing and interviewing participants in their daily activities in their surrounding environment. A video-cued method accelerates this process. The work is ethnographic because it focuses on *quotidian* aspects of ordinary days in preschool classrooms in three cultures (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). The focus on culture as the explanatory construct, and the insider's explanations and of *emic* over *etic* analytic categories and theories makes this an ethnographic study (Spindler, 2000).

Versions of video-cued ethnography have been used in other studies such as Spindler and Spindler in their comparative study of schools in Germany and Wisconsin (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). These anthropologists were interested in understanding the cultural and psychological resources that populations in Germany and Wisconsin used to adapt to situations of social change. In another study, Fujita and Sano (1988) compared daycare centers in the United States and Japan focusing on different aspects of the environment; from noise level to the amount of teacher control. Anderson-Levitt (2002) in their comparative study examined French and U.S. exploration of teaching first graders to read.

Research Design

This study used aspects of multi-sited ethnography to conduct video-cued focus groups and individual interviews with administrators in schools and districts that serve Latino immigrant communities. I use a film of a first-grade classroom to provoke discussions with administrators around early childhood practices. In the following section I will outline how I chose the research sites, selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the data with administrators.

Site selection. My study focused on administrators from districts in Texas with similar student demographics. I conducted focus groups and individual interviews with administrators in four districts that primarily serve Latino immigrant communities. The four districts had a high percentage of English language learners and minority populations. Three of the districts were in urban cities in south central Texas. The fourth district was in a border town between Texas and Tamaulipas, Mexico.

The following table shows the similarities in demographics of the four districts in this study.

Table 1. Participating Districts' Demographics

	Dalias ISD	Almendra ISD	Vela ISD	Hortensia ISD
% Minorities	97%	75%	98%	97%
% English Language Learners	16%	25%	25%	14%
% Poverty Rate	41%	30%	48%	38%
% Hispanic Students	90%	61%	98%	93%

Compared to other districts in neighboring areas, these four districts had a high number of English Language Learners. For example, a school district neighboring Dalias ISD has 1% ELL and 22% Hispanic students. A school district neighboring Almendra ISD has 7% ELL and 30% Hispanic students. Entry into school districts was made by convenience sample, with the help of personal networks.

Participant selection. This study focused on participants who were administrators at elementary school and district levels. I interviewed three levels of administrators that included superintendents and deputy superintendents, central office administrators, and principals and assistant principals in public schools in Texas with a high number of Latino immigrants. Administrators often hold the highest positions in the district and are considered interviewing the "elite" (Merriam, 2002)

I recognized that access to this level of administration was a privilege and connected to my positionality as a school administrator. By interviewing three levels, I

obtained valuable information because of the position they held in the school organization. They provided me with an overview of the organization, its policies, perspectives and limitations (Merriam, 2002). A potential disadvantage that I faced was the difficulty to gain access and the times for scheduling interviews were limited. I had to be cautious to keep the interviews to the allotted time given by the administrators.

Recruitment. I recruited assistant principals, principals, deputy superintendents and superintendents through purposeful sampling. The goal and purpose for selecting the participants was to have those that would yield the most relevant and plentiful data, to answer my topic of study (Yi, 2011). The following table summarizes information about the participants, sites, and the groups. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 2. Participant Pseudonyms

No.	District	Level	Gender	Ethnicity	Pseudonym
1a	Almendaras ISD	Principal	F	Latina	Principal Alonzo
1b	Almendaras ISD	Asst. Principal	F	Latina	AP Chavez
2	Dalias ISD	Asst. Superintendent	M	Latino	Dr. Meraz
3a	Vela ISD	Principal	F	Caucasian	Prinicpal Smith
3b	Vela ISD	Asst. Principal	F	Latina	AP Santiago
4a	Vela ISD	Superintendent	M	Latino	Superintendent Alvarez
4b	Vela ISD	Director of Curriculum	M	Latino	Mr. Perez
5	Almendaras ISD	Principal	F	Caucasian	Prinicpal Charles
6	Almendaras ISD	Principal	F	Latina	Principal Soto
7	Hortencia ISD	Superintendent	M	Latino	Superintendent Hernandez
8	Dalias ISD	Prinicpal	F	Latina	Principal Torres
9	Dalias ISD	Deputy Superintendent	M	Caucasian	Dr. White
10	Dalias ISD	Superintendent	M	Latino	Superintendent Milan

All 13 administrators worked in districts serving Latino immigrant communities.

Principal Alonzo was a first-year principal in her early 40s. Assistant principal Chavez was a middle-aged female. Both administrators had been at the district all their career.

Dr. Meraz was a male in his late 40s. He began his career as a bilingual teacher and then worked for the Reading First Grant visiting and supporting schools in central Texas in literacy practices. After the grant finished, he became principal of an elementary school for 2 years and was promoted to Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the district. At the time the research team interviewed him, the team concluded that he would one day be superintendent. A year later, he became superintendent of a small district in Central Texas.

Principal Smith, a female in her mid-40s came to live to Texas from Wisconsin 10 years ago. She had been principal of the school near the border town of Texas for 3 years. Her assistant principal Chavez was a teacher at the same school and then became assistant principal.

Superintendent Alvarez was a dynamic, energetic, male in his early 50s. When the interview took place, it was the second year of his superintendency. Mr. Perez, a male in his late 40s had been working in central office for 5 years. The interview took place with the superintendent and he allowed the superintendent to answer most of the questions.

Principal Charles was a female in her mid-50s. She worked as a teacher in California and Missouri and then moved to Texas. She has worked at the Texas district

for almost 20 years and had been principal at the school where we interviewed her for 6 years.

Principal Soto, a female in her late 40s, had been a principal at her school for 4 years and worked at the same district

Superintendent Hernandez had spent his entire career in Hortensia ISD. He was raised in the community where he attended elementary, middle, and high school. He then became a teacher at the district and then started climbing the administrative ladder becoming assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and finally superintendent. When we interviewed him he had been superintendent for 4 years.

Principal Torres was a female in her mid-50's. She was raised in the valley and came to Dalias ISD as a bilingual teacher. She taught for 12 years, worked as an instructional coach for 3 years, and an administrator for 8 years.

Dr. White was a male in his early 60s. Most of his education career was spent in a border town in Texas. He was a music teacher for 15 years and then became an administrator as a principal in elementary, middle, and high school. His current role is serving as Deputy Superintendent for Academics at Dalias ISD.

Superintendent Milan has never taught in the classroom. His experience came from the financial/business side. He began his career in parochial schools and later moved to the Chicago Public Schools as the Chief Financial Officer. He completed a superintendency program at the Broad Center. He was a superintendent in a large urban district in Nevada and now leads Dalias ISD. When we interviewed him, it was his first year on the job.

Data collection. In this study, data collection included, selecting a film, generating questions and conducting focus groups and interviews.

Film selection. Following the practice of multivocal, video-cued ethnography, this study used video to prompt discussion within focus groups and interviews with administrator participants. The video selected is the same video used in the larger study from Agency and Young Children Project.

The film depicts a first-grade classroom in which the children and the teachers have a significant amount of power to influence how and what they learn. The school in the film is in the south-central part of Texas. The population of the school is 70% Hispanic, 16% African-American, 11% White and 1% Asian, 69% of students receive low-cost or free lunches through the National School Lunch Program. The school does not offer bilingual education programs even though it serves many Latino immigrant families.

The film depicts a typical day in the first-grade classroom. It begins with the children entering the classroom at the beginning of the school day. The film shows scenes that include math, daily 5 literacy lessons, and the project based approach (Katz, 1994). Each of these approaches, as evidenced in scenes throughout the film, provide opportunities for students to interact and collaborate as they learn together. The first part of the video shows the teacher and the students engaged in conversation about a car accident that their teacher was involved in the day before. The video also shows activities that occur during the week connected to the project based approach, which build upon the accident.

The final part of the video shows the routines the students follow as they complete the daily five practices, which focuses on literacy activities including reading to each other, working on phonics, spelling and writing activities. Students in the video are quite active in their learning. They move around freely in the classroom and they choose who they work with and where they work. They yell out ideas and work in collaboration and ask to do alternative activities when the class is doing something they don't want to do. The film offers an atypical version of a public first grade classroom particularly one that serves Latino immigrant children.

The videos served as a stimulus for conversation within the focus groups. Administrators were asked to reflect on what they think about the video and how it is similar or different to the classrooms in their district. What do they like or dislike? Do they think the way the classroom is conducted is productive for the learning process of students? By showing the same video to administrators, I could produce data that helped me uncover similarities and differences in their answers. Their discussion served as the data to be analyzed to find patterns among the administrators' answers.

Generating guiding interview questions. Although ethnography does not include a strict set of interview questions, I prepared a set of guiding interview questions to ensure that I could obtain data that would allow me to analyze and compare the administrators' perspectives and answer my research question. The guiding interview questions I prepared, include three layers of questions that encompass three main ideas: The first layer is the overall impression of the classroom including the interaction of the students with each other and the teacher and the dynamic of the classroom, including

classroom management. The second layer of questions help identifying specific characteristics of a highly effective early childhood classroom. The third layer of questions are guided towards identifying what administrators think of children having decision-making power within the early childhood setting and the influence of administrators in these spaces.

The guiding interview questions relate directly to my research questions:

> Research question: How do school and district administrators serving Latino immigrant communities describe how young children should learn in early grades (Prekindergarten-third)?

Table 3. Layer 1 Interview Questions (Overall Impression) Layer 1: Overall Impression

Interview Questions:
What did you think about the classroom?
What stood out to you as you watched?
Is this what you expected to see?
What did you like about the classroom?
What did you not like about the classroom?
How is this similar or different from what you would see in your school or in your district schools?

Table 4. Layer 2 Interview Questions. (Identifying characteristics of highly effective early childhood classrooms)

Interview Questions-
What practices in the film would you hope to see in your version of an ideal classroom? Which ones would you not want to see?
How does this classroom model fit with your district guidelines for pedagogy and curriculum?
How do these practices effect students' performance on achievement tests?

Table 5.Layer 3 Interview Questions. (Decision-Making power in the classroom)

Interview Questions
There is a lot of freedom in this classroom – what do you think about that?
Do you think that affects how well children learn?
How much influence do you think kids should have in a classroom?
During the beginning when the kids want to talk about the car accident – what do you think about that?
How much should kids interests influence what they learn about at school? Some teachers thought the kids were talking too much and some teachers thought the kids had too much freedom – what do you think?
I know you visit a lot of classrooms – how would you evaluate it?
How about behavior management?
Do you have a say in whether classrooms use some of these practices?

Conducting focus groups and individual interviews. The participants were given an explanation of the project and the film by giving them an overview of the process, which included watching a 20-minute video of a typical day in a first-grade classroom. There was a video camera filming the participants in the focus group. This recording was used as a method of reliability to validate that the information transcribed was accurate. Another reason for recording the interviews was that the camera could capture the administrators' comments as they were watching the film.

After the video was finished, participants were asked open-ended questions such as: What did you think of the video? Were you surprised by anything in the video? Following these open-ended questions, supported by the guiding questions (Layer 1& 2) developed in phase 2, I asked questions specific to administrators about whether they would consider the classroom in the video a high quality early childhood classroom. Administrators could explain how much influence they had in what occurred in the classrooms.

The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours. Dr. Jennifer Adair and members of the research team of the Agency and Young Children Project participated in the interviews. The objective of inviting them into the interviews was to ask additional questions that could be helpful to my analysis. At times, the administrators assumed that because of my positionality as an administrator they did not have to elaborate on their answers, if I already knew some of the information. The participation of the research team members permitted them to dig deeper into their answers.

After completing the data analysis, I realized that I had missed an important question so I contacted half of the participants via email, phone call, and personally to ask them what they were seeing in the early childhood classrooms today.

Data analysis. Analysis began with transcription of the interviews. The first part of the analysis involved reading all the interviews. The second reading involved reading each response and then assigning what was the main idea the administrator was saying. Different themes started to surface. Looking for patterns meant looking at the common words, phrases, and policy that was cited and examples and comparisons from their schools.

The next level of analysis involved taking all the main ideas and looking for themes that emerged from the transcripts. Emergent themes helped me identify the practices that administrators connect to high quality ECE and offer insight into the different ways administrators talk about what kinds of experiences young children of immigrants should have. Organizing the data by theme enabled the data to be analyzed as answers given by a group of administrators rather than individual cases. This is important to an ethnographic study since it is concerned with how a culture group constructs meaning (Geertz,1970).

My data analysis followed an inductive process since I returned to the data for subsequent turns of analysis. The findings I presented reflect the descriptions the participants gave me. Analysis continued during the writing process as I dove deeper in trying to understand why they answered the way they did. I also made sure to think about the theoretical framework in which I situated the research. The way I analyzed the data

was done through thinking of each participants as part of a cultural group not just one individual. In the findings chapter my goal was to conceptualize their description that they gave me into my reflection of a broader understanding of how administrators operate in their space.

Ensuring the data. This data was collected in specific context. I analyzed this data through a larger socio-cultural lens. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) argue that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its social and institutional context is largely lost when the textual data are quantified. Qualitative research helped me understand what is unique about a situation and was used to analyze and understand the situation (Merriam, 2002). To ensure we can better understand the perspective of administrators who work with early childhood classrooms as well as administrators who work with high number of immigrant students, I used Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness framework as part of my analytic process. Guba and Lincoln (1990), offer four criteria that should be considered to ensure trustworthiness. These include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility. Initially, for ensuring credibility which Lincoln and Guba argue is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. I addressed what they recommend by implementing a research method that has already been established and has been proven successful before. In the video-cued interview, modeled after Tobin's (2000) multivocal ethnography, I conducted an in-depth interview recorded in video. The process involved having the participants watch a video of a classroom, where students are

giving the opportunity to make choices in their learning opportunities and then I interviewed the participants.

The second recommendation of Guba and Lincoln is to have an adequate understanding of the organization and to establish a relationship of trust between the parties. My positionality as an administrator and a former teacher allowed me to establish a relationship of trust with the participants. Preliminary visits to the schools in the district, reading the AEIS reports and obtaining background information about the participants strengthened my understanding of the organization and fostered the trust of the administrators.

I used purpose sampling of my participants. The participants held the highest positions in the district and were considered the "elite" and their contribution was valuable because of the position. They could provide an overview of the organization, its policies, perspectives and limitations. The major disadvantage was that due to their position it is difficult to gain access to them and consequently the number of candidates to interview was reduced.

Guba and Lincoln suggest as a form of triangulation the use of a wide range of informants. This is exactly what I achieved with the original design of the study as was described before, by choosing three levels of administrators. This is an important consideration of this type of design to provide triangulation. The research process included a debriefing and a reflective commentary after each session, with the research team from the Agency and Young Children Project under the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Adair. According to Patton (1990), the background, qualifications and experience of the

researcher is especially important in qualitative research. My experience of more than 15 years in the classroom and as an administrator provided me the required qualifications and experience that supported the credibility of the research. Finally, all the interviews were recorded both in voice and video so that data extracted was checked for accuracy.

Transferability Lincoln and Guba suggest that it is the responsibility of the researcher only to ensure that sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites are provided to enable others to make the transfer of the conclusions. I described the information of the districts like, size of the district, demographics, and economic environment, and all information that can describe the districts without having to identify them. I also described information about the administrators to provide the adequate context to enable other to make their desired transfer of the results. Lincoln and Guba argue that in practice a demonstration of credibility assure in great degree dependability.

Dependability. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that unlike quantitative studies, where it is argued that if the work is repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained. It is neutral to time. In qualitative studies, we are analyzing a *going concern* a term used by Dewey as an organization that is changing with time. Time is of the essence of the result, and as such, precludes dependability as is understood in quantitative studies. However, Lincoln and Guba recommend addressing the issues of dependability more direct, through a detailed description of the research design, its implementation, the operational detail of data gathering, and the reflective appraisal of the project.

Confirmability. In qualitative research confirmability is comparable to the concept of objectivity in quantitative research. The way the study is designed guarantees the findings are the result of the experience and descriptions from the participants and not from the researcher, the role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must again be emphasized. When my ideas are expressed, I make sure to mention that it is my reflection to the results of the study.

Positionality. This positioning requires that we examine our own histories, and keep in touch with our many selves, in order to make a difference in what we care about and to which we dedicate our professional lives—education. I am a teacher and an administrator. Teaching, in the broadest sense of the term, has always been my first job; however, the specifics of how each student learns, is my particular focus. I doubt that changing every piece of content, systematizing administrative tasks or curriculum choices will matter one bit unless we focus ourselves, our teachers and administrators on learning. My area of concentration involves the education of children in early childhood settings; my interest lies in understanding what and who makes a classroom a place where children thrive to learn.

I am an administrator in the public education system. I was interested in the voices, the talk, the dialogue, the conversations, the questions that were raised by people in my position, who made decisions about the curriculum and instruction that takes place in early childhood classrooms and consequently I was an insider. I made sure to think about their answers not as an insider and to separate their answers from how I thought. As an insider I was careful not to include questions that framed the administrators to respond

a certain way. In my study, whenever I shared my views I explicitly mentioned that it was how I viewed high quality early childhood education.

Limitations

I recognized that access to this level of administration was a privilege and connected to my positionality as a school administrator. By interviewing three levels, I obtained valuable information because of the position they held in the school organization. They provided me with an overview of the organization, its policies, perspectives and limitations (Merriam, 2002). A limitation of the study was the difficulty to gain access to more administrators and the participants that I did have access to were either people that I knew directly or were indirectly known by someone I knew; despite the challenge to gain access to the participants, I presume they responded openly and honestly when voicing their reaction to the video and sharing their perspectives.

In my study I chose districts in urban and border towns of Texas with similar demographics. Another limitation of this study is that I did not include participants from districts in rural areas, with different demographics, where administrators might think differently or encourage different practices from the participants in the study.

The method I used gave me access only to what they said in their narrative as they answered the interviews, not their conscious or unconscious thinking or feeling (Adair, 2009). Another limitation is that being that people act in logical ways and because administrators are part of an educational political setting in a school district, it is plausible that administrators were answering thinking for whom they were directing their answers to (Adair, 2009). The participants were answering to people who came from a

university. They knew, as part of an education entity, what the "current research" was describing as best practices in schools. It was natural then for administrators to answer what is politically correct. Bakhtin calls this, addressivity-to whom one is speaking (Bakhtin, 1948). Gee (2014) mentions, their responses were given in their own context.

Chapter Four: Administrators' Perspectives on Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education

The aim of this study was to uncover how administrators in urban and border cities of Texas describe the types of early learning experiences young children should have in early learning grades, especially in schools with a high number of first generation immigrant students. The study also uncovered what administrators described as the best pedagogical practices for young children of immigrants beginning school.

I begin by discussing the perspectives and ideas held by administrators regarding the most effective ways children in the early learning classrooms learn. Their responses were consistent with the prevailing conceptual framework offered by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The administrators' views created a strong sense of concern in me because the current literature can attest that these practices are not being offered to Latino immigrant students (Pas, Larson, Reinke, Herman, & Bradshaw, 2016; Colbert, 2010; Adair, 2015; Ford, 2010). My experience as an administrator who has visited more than 100 classrooms reaffirms this inconsistency (Licona, 2013; Gillborn, 2010).

This compelled me to dive more deeply into the analysis to try to understand the complex set of factors that influence their actions and so gave meaning to their answers (Gee, 2014). To uncover if there were hidden or explicit contradictions in their comments and if their understanding on pedagogy practices in early learning classrooms include the sociocultural perspective that is important to establish the most effective learning environment for Latino immigrant children.

Administrators are political actors both in the education political system, within schools and districts (micropolitics) and the larger political system (state and federal policy). It is important to understand how administrators might frame conversations because of the pressure associated to playing in this environment.

Findings

Using video-cued ethnography, which included having administrators watch a video, followed by interviewing them to get their response to the film, I was able to capture how this group defined the learning practices that describe a high quality early learning classroom. The setting of the video used in the study was a typical day in a first-grade classroom. The following six collective ideas emerged related to how early learning students learn in a high quality early learning classroom.

Relationships. Strong relationships lead to a more productive classroom. It is based on an element of trust between teacher to student and student to student and implies a mutual respect between them.

Collaborative learning. Administrators believe that teachers need to create an approach conducive to collaborative learning where all the participants share in the process of learning as they work together in the classroom.

Conflict resolution. Administrators cite numerous examples from the video that demonstrated well-developed conflict resolution skills for the students in the classroom. For them, developing conflict resolution protocol empower students to take responsibility of their actions and possess the necessary tools to problem solve.

Curriculum driven by student interest. Administrators had numerous remarks regarding engaging students by focusing on students' interests- means of allowing students to ask questions, making learning fun, and allowing students to be active.

Real world connections. Administrators agree that student learning should be based on real world experiences because that is how students learn best, when they connect their learning with a familiar experience in their environment.

Student choice. When administrators talk about student choice they went from describing a simple task as choosing who to work with to a more complex task like choosing what they want to learn. Administrators stressed the importance of giving students confidence to make choices because that expands the opportunity to become more inquisitive.

Relationships

There is an element of trust teacher-to-students and student-to-student depicted in the video. The school day captured in the video includes scene after scene of interactions between the teacher and students. The students feel comfortable to speak up without hesitation. The environment of the classroom is very relaxed, where the children can move around and speak to each other. The students help each other with their work without interference from the teacher; they are self-directed. When the teacher offers instruction or re-direction she does so once, she does not repeat herself, and yet the students immediately react to her. She moved about the classroom very comfortably and helped all the students, but they also know how to communicate with one another if there was a problem. It's not only the relationship she has developed with them but the

relationship they have built with one another, and in each one you could see how the teacher has built strong relationships with her students (Breeman et al., 2015; Linvill, 2014).

Administrators agreed that strong relationships were part of the classroom dynamic in the video. Strong relationships lead to a more productive classroom because it is conducive to collaborative learning which implies a mutual respect teacher to student and among students. The relationship begins with the teacher understanding the needs of each student and then allowing the space for the students in the classroom to create an environment for considering each other as they work in the classroom as mentioned by Principal Smith,

> If you are taking a look at a child and you see that the child needs something or that there is some barrier to his learning, then we need to target those barriers, and try to help that child fix those barriers so he can come to school ready to learn.

There are two examples from the video that show strong relationships among the students. In one scene, a student that does not know how to work out a math problem is helped by another student, who comes up and takes her to the number chart to explain how to solve the problem. In another scene, someone is trying to spell out a word, and another student comes up and begins dictating out each letter, helping the first student spell-out the word. The students interact on their own without having to ask the teacher for help. They work as a community so they call upon one another to solve a problem.

The administrators captured the healthy relationships that exist in the classroom as evidenced by the way students interact with one another with little direction from the teacher on what is appropriate or acceptable behavior. Principal Alonzo shares,

> If she had to intervene, [she would ask] why did you think this, or if she had to come and ask them something it was the level of questioning; she had them thinking all the time. And she never said you're wrong, it was always very positive you could see that she respected her students and they respected the teacher.

Principal Soto also shared similar thoughts,

> One thing that I liked is that the teacher did not have to rush in to redirect the students. The students work it out on their own, thus the students were able to develop better relationships amongst each other and learn the process of interpersonal communication and respect among each other….The teacher keeps it very simple and has a good relationship with the students. It may not be perfect, but overall it is at a pretty good level.

As Dr. White continued,

> A lot of it you can see, if you look at the dynamics of the relationships between the teacher and the students. That is easier to pick up...the responses from the kids, and the level of respect and motivation.

In one scene of the video the teacher gathers the students into a group and she discusses and acknowledges the good practices the students have demonstrated when they were working together. She also discussed with them an event where a student

approached her with a problem, but the teacher encouraged the student to solve the issue with her peers; if she was not able to do this, the teacher suggested to move to another group. The teacher utilized the discussions to help students develop skills where they can and should work with one another, as Principal Smith stated,

> Communication not only teacher-to-student but student-to-teacher, and students-to-students. At one point towards the very end the teacher tells the students, I want you to be able to solve problems on your own.

The air and rhythm of mutual respect that was noted by participants is not something that happens without the teacher establishing norms and expectations. Principal Charles noted,

> You have to build relationships with the kids but you can't make yourself that sage on the stage. You have to be one of those people that is there to help them with their learning.

If classroom management issues were to arise, the administrators highlighted that the teacher resolved them without a punitive tone or action. Dr. White stated,

> The teacher did not have to jump in right away all the time. The student in the video [who wandered off] did come back to the group. I do not see that it is a big deal. I think if that the students were disrespectful or if the cross the line and did something egregious she would certainly step in and do something about it, but there really was not anything that was egregious in the video.

Principal Torres commented, the sense of community, the mutuality in the classroom was established; it was not contrived, nor was there a need for constant reminder to behave and interact in a certain way. It was evident by the respect between teacher and students, and students with students.

It seems that the administrators are telling me that when they see a teacher stepping back and allowing student to interact with each other that is helpful as a way to set up a positive community (Hattie & Gan, 2011). The positive effects of the teacher building strong relationships are believed to be the results of how the teacher communicated with her students and the mutual trust that ensued, as noted by Superintendent Milan, "In her classroom it works because the teacher developed that trust and atmosphere in her classroom."

The administrators agreed on the importance of building relationships as the basic component that will lead to a more productive classroom. They also agreed that a fundamental support of this relationship is based on the reciprocal trust between teachers and students. Several administrators used the word trust when they were describing building relationships but on occasions throughout the interviews, the way they describe immigrant students depicts a deficit view.

Challenges to building trust. In the following vignette two administrators describe what happens when immigrant students arrive to their school. When parents check off that the child speaks another language other than English at home, the child is given a language proficiency test. They are describing children entering in prekindergarten and kindergarten.

Principal Smith: Yes, same thing with Kinder. If they are new to us and they are weak in both, we'll put them in English.

Ale : Have you ever had the parent say like, "whoa?"

Principal Smith: A little bit, but no. For the most part, those kids they don't because they haven't been helping them anyways.

J Adair: Helping them like in the language?

Principal Smith: Helping them with anything. Right, so we figure you know what we got them we might as well put them in English and really push them in there.

Assistant Principal Chavez: And I think once we explain to the parents, you know your child is weak in both and here in the US we really want them to develop English, it's going to be harder for us to develop the Spanish.

This deficit view is also reflected in the comments made by Principal Soto to describe parents.

We have very little participation in PTA and that's been one of our biggest struggles as well, because that mirrors the level of, it's not the willingness from our new population, they want to be here and want to do, but they don't know where those fine lines are. They don't know that when you come to the school, yes I want you to be welcome, but if you bring your children to eat for example, I have lots of examples, take eating in the cafeteria with the kids, yes bring them a McDonalds lunch once a

week or something you made from home but if you are bringing your child or children the younger ones, this is a school and you are responsible for them. Keep them with you, don't let the children…it's been a challenge and I have had to have one on one conversations with many of the parents. This is not what we do, the way we come dressed to school, oh wow, we are modeling, every adult here is a model is a teacher if you will, so the moment you step into the school and you come to help us, please don't come dressed like this. All those little things, they matter. You would think that they don't, but they do.

Following the same deficit tone, Principal Alonzo mentioned the need to increase the vocabulary that immigrant students should be exposed to because they need more words. Her comments are following the current education trend that argues that immigrant children enter the school with a word deficit (Hart & Risley, 1995).

> [T]he teacher that I observed yesterday, in her room she had a lot of print a lot of vocabulary things that students could refer to so when she was instructing. If the student was stuck in a vocabulary didn't know what to say they immediately knew to go to the anchors. They knew how to use them it was amazing. Teachers just put things up for show but these kids were actually taught to use whatever words that were put up on the walls.

Finally, Superintendent Milan adds on the vocabulary deficit the following comment,

> Especially with English language learners, and high poverty children. You need to build up their comprehension and vocabulary. Middle class kids even though it is not good instruction you could get away with lecturing, but not with high poverty children because these children do not have the same support system at home. They do not have the ability to make up for the deficiencies in the classroom therefore we are it.

The way they commented about these deficits may erode the required trust that needs to be built between the teacher and the students. Trust is based on building confidence in students and it is based on the belief that the student is capable (Hattie, 2012). Unconsciously, their deficit view can put into question the relationship of trust that needs to be built in schools.

At no point did any of the administrators view the children who they worked with (immigrant Latino) as students bringing their resiliency and strengths into the classrooms. While they noted the students' characteristics as immigrant students, they did not balance that with remarks to say or imply that the students nonetheless possessed other learning abilities. The participants' lack or acknowledgement of students' capacity reflects a deficit view from the administrators. It seems that the students' immigrant status to the administrators was a deficit and reflected on the students in a negative way (Colegrove &

Adair, 2014; Licona, 2013; Gillborn, 2010; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). In this case, the way administrators talk about the deficit that immigrant students bring to the classroom represents a "story line" that bonds a group like administrators together (Gee, 2014).

When administrators mentioned the knowledge deficit, they did not recognize that immigrant students at times come from situations of hardship. The level of knowledge they show should not be interpreted as a deficit but rather recognized as resiliency (Nolan, Taket & Stagnitti, 2014; Sosa & Gomez, 2012; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). This interpretation suggests that this is a positive feature to build on top of the resilience to improve the learning process for immigrant students.

The way administrators commented about the language proficiency deficit, shows that their comments tend to be socio-culturally neutral (Adair, 2009) because they did not recognize that speaking two languages was an advantage. Even though they were weak in both languages, speaking two languages indicates a higher language proficiency, as a whole. They do not recognize that their language proficiency exists in both languages. It was unexpected because most of the participant in the focus groups, were themselves Latino immigrants or coming from a Latino family. Their resilience helped them to continue their education and be successful in their field despite the deficit views others assigned to them.

Collaborative Learning

Administrators brought up collaborative learning as something they liked to see in the classrooms. The scene where a group of children are trying to figure out how to write the number twenty-one prompted the administrators to talk about collaborative learning.

The administrators believe that teachers need to create an environment that is conducive to collaborative learning. The administrators described, as in the previous finding, positive relationships and the trust that is created teacher-student and among students merge to create a classroom culture and environment that promotes collaborative learning (Nemeth & Simon, 2013; Vermette, Harper, & DiMillo, 2004). Administrators seem to think that when the classroom has a sense of community there is a mutual willingness to assist one another, which is fostered by the teacher (Lim,2012). Superintendent Hernandez stated, "She wanted them to use each other to help," and Principal Torres commented, "You did not see kids hitting each other, instead you saw kids helping each other. There is a sense of community that the teacher has built in her classroom."

The administrators responded to children working with one another and it seemed that for them, collaborative learning was connected to harmony and getting along. They seemed to think that students hitting each other does not promote collaboration. So, when an administrator walks into a classroom, one thing she can observe is whether the students get along.

The administrators' responses to collaborative learning make sense because in the video there were several scenes showing the students working in pairs or groups. They

gravitated to one another to work. The teacher encouraged this dynamic; she gave them space to work in pairs or at tables and the students enjoyed working with each other as noted by Dr. White.

> This allows teachers to intentionally set up a learning environment in which children will learn from one another. This limits any type of behavior problems within the groups. I think effective teachers have a systematic way of pairing students such as pair and share .

The pairing of students, whether or not strategic, evoked positive behaviors. Superintendent Hernandez commented, "The kids seemed to enjoy working with each other. It seemed like it was an expectation that the kids go back and work with each other."

It appears that administrators value when teachers give students the space to work together because important traits surface among the students, for example the opportunity for students to take leadership roles (Vermeete, Harper, & DiMillo, 2004). Principal Smith noted, "In working with each other, certain dynamics occur among the students, such as when the young man took on the leadership role and the young lady chose to collaborate with him," and Superintendent Alvarez stated, "[when] she let them work together, the three little girls, they are looking over at each other to see how to spell."

For the administrators in the study, a collaborative learning environment, when well established, created a learner-centered environment. But in the video the teacher goes a step further in empowering the students to understand that whatever their actions,

it affects the whole group (Vermette, Harper, & DiMillo, 2004). Superintendent Hernandez commented,

> What we really need is for the kids to look at themselves as the learners and how all their actions interact—themselves and the other learners. Such an environment is, once again, created by the teacher's inimitable way, the way she approached it. I don't know if she necessarily meant to do that, but it was about, I don't want you coming up to me; rather than, when you are doing that, are you being responsible to your fellow learners. When you are doing that is it respectful to the group.

Administrators described and agreed that the video showed scenes where students were engaged in collaborative learning. The teacher created an environment that was conducive to collaborative learning and students were working in a semi-structural manner. But for some of administrators, this environment presumed non-traditional behaviors that they didn't agreed with. Principal Soto shares the following idea.

> Maybe a little too much comfort, if I put on my teacher hat. Because the student seem very comfortable and very happy, I didn't get a sense of are they being taught, because everything was in the classroom, oh no, there was a shot where they were outside. So how are they in the halls, how are they taught to be in the halls it's good to be orderly? I don't know if that is taught or if there's a need because we only saw the classroom. For example, I'm just thinking about routines, the pledges weren't there, is

> that ever taught, it's time to be, this is how we show respect. In respect to just use, I'm just thinking about when we address whole groups in school, there is a time to teach that type of behavior.

For some of them, allowing the children to talk and collaborate with each other implied that some of them were not learning. This subtle negative comment of how the children were interacting implicitly means that some of the administrators are not prepared to accept the pre-conditions (freedom to move and talk) that need to be established to generate a classroom conducive to collaborative learning.

Challenges to Collaborative Learning. In the administrators' answers, there was a lack of reference and recognition of what immigrant Latino students, bring to the classroom from their socio-cultural background. Children from Latino immigrant families collaborate in a natural way in the family dynamic (Pas, Larson, Reinke, Herman, & Bradshaw, 2016; Colbert, 2010; Ford, 2010; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). It appears that in their answers there is a tendency to deny cultural differences implying that the cultural practice of the dominant group are taken as the norm (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). For example, it is common in Latino families to take care of siblings almost in the role of a parent. In this act, they are collaborating with their parents in raising their siblings as described by Dr. Alvarez who shares his own experience,

> We piled up on the car and driving pulling up to the house, my mother carrying my brother that had been ill. We live five miles from town so she is carrying him because he was extremely ill and he was dying drops us off, picks them up and drives them to the hospital. They are there for a

> couple of days and the doctors can't do anything, so they had to take him to Denver General, so they are gone for about three days. So here I am nine years old taking care of the family, and there was a field behind the house that we had worked.

This administrator did not connect his own personal experience to his answers as he describes collaboration in the classroom. So, this tells me that administrators need to work on viewing immigrant children as bringing a positive feature of their own socio-cultural heritage. For Latino immigrant students, collaboration is part of everyday life, administrators should view this as an added strength of Latino students in understanding that they can collaborate with and help their fellow students.

In the Meso-American ancient cultures from where many of the immigrant families come from, collaboration and even collective behaviors constitute its unity and identity. (Diaz, 2002; Pas et al., 2016; Rogoff, 1994; Wagner, 2002). But I argue that the dominant discourse in the schools in the United States tend to favor competitiveness vs collaboration. The standardization in schools proves the nature of competitiveness (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). Latino immigrant students inherently learn in collaboration and the lack of offering these learning environments for the students hinders their natural way of learning.

Conflict Resolution

Administrators discussed conflict resolution and its implication on classroom management. Conflict resolution allowed students the opportunity to increase their voice

in the classroom. The teacher, through routines, has established ways in which students can resolve their own problems. This ultimately balances the power of negotiating conflict among the students, and precludes the teacher as primary agent to resolve every problem in the classroom. Developing conflict resolution protocols empowers students to take responsibility for their actions and possess the necessary tools to problem solve (Killen, Ardila-Rey, Barakkatz, & Wang, 2000; Souto-Manning, 2014;Vestal & Jones, 2004;). Superintendent Milan cited examples from the video that demonstrated well-developed conflict resolution skills.

> As the video progressed what I saw was the teacher allowing her students to problem solve. That to me was an example of the teacher allowing the kids to problem solve and to help each other. That to me is a good evidence point that she has been doing this group and collaborative type of work throughout the year because children are not used to that instead of going to the teacher and asking the teacher every question they are actually trying to problem solve among themselves

Superintendent Milan continues,

> The camera caught some interesting scenes on the non-academic side. There was student who almost tripped over another child, and the children were able to solve it. It was interesting to see that at the end of class the teacher brought that [to the attention of] the class, how the students solved the problem among themselves. It made me realize that that act [of bringing it to all students' attention] was not a random act, that the teacher

actually is developing those skill sets with her students to allow them to problem solve independently.

The skills the teacher is working to develop in the students is woven into the classroom culture; addressing these skills is not an isolated experience as Dr. Meraz mentions,

> …you also saw very strong character building with the conflict resolution. She has set the ground rules, the foundation, since day one.

By having established norms for classroom conflict resolution, the teacher has empowered the students; for example, Principal Smith noted,

> …there was only one instance of it, but there was conflict resolution. When the young man or the two young men were sitting there, right, and then the one trying to explain, 'You know what I really didn't mean it', he was guilty, but anyway. But he was being very diplomatic about resolving the issue and then getting back to being friends again, which obviously they did because at the end they started walking back into the group….The young man that did a conflict resolution, he was choosing to resolve the issue versus just walk away or go do something else or maybe even have the teacher intervene to resolve the issue.

According to Superintendent Milan, the boys' actions to resolve their conflict demonstrated

> …how this teacher was handling some of the conflicts that occurred in her class. This teacher is not afraid to let go which I really appreciate. The teacher lets the students do a lot of independent activities. This shows me

> that she has built a relationship with the children, which allows them to learn independently. Some teachers do not do that; they want to keep lecturing to the kids because they do not trust the students to actually let go of them.

Curriculum Driven by Student Interests

The teacher was aware of the students' interests and made special effort to have the learning be relevant to the students (Adair, 2014; Henderson, Sabbagh, & Woodward, 2013; Tobin, 2005). During the video, when the teacher was sharing the details of the accident in which she was involved, she discussed the car having to be towed. When she mentioned this, the students showed lots of interest and had numerous questions for her. The teacher directed the students to write their questions and save them, since she had invited a tow truck and driver to visit the school the next day. The next day, the students were able to ask questions to the tow truck driver and wrote notes about how a tow truck works.

Administrators liked this scene. They collectively agreed on the importance of engaging students' interests as a fundamental approach to creating a high quality early learning environment.

> Dr. Meraz commented on incorporating strategies to engage students:
>
> For example [in the video], whenever she started the lesson and she started asking some of the questions to kind of hook their interest, which is a critical piece, there was more opportunity for the kids [to engage] a strategy that we've used here in the district or many other places, it is the

> ‘think then share,’ which is thinking about the question and giving the students time to digest it first then talking it out with a partner and then at that point start sharing it out.

Principal Alonzo remarks addressed the need to appropriately contextualize the lessons to something that is interesting to the students,

> I remember my last year as a teacher or when I was teaching I had to always use relevant, cultural relevant stories to get their interest or things that I knew that they could relate to like soap operas. The teacher has to figure out what to do with that child so finding what their interests are and what they like and what they don't is really important to get them motivated.

Administrators believe it is important to note students’ interests as essential to developing the necessary relationships. Principal Alonzo commented, “I believe it’s important to build those relationships with students, and in order to do that the teacher needs to get to know what are the students’ interests.”

Whether it is using instructional strategies, contextualizing lessons, building relationships each represent fundamental practices to support the work within the classroom to attract student interest. In addition, the administrators brought up three techniques teachers can use to capture students’ interest: first by allowing students to ask questions; second by making learning fun, and third by allowing students to be active, to be engaged.

Toward the beginning of the video, as the teacher was explaining that her previous day's absence was due to being involved in a car accident, the students began asking many questions. The teacher took advantage of the students' interest and questions; she did not attempt to end the discussion, but put aside the lesson of the day and seized it as an opportunity for learning (Boyd, 2015; Weiss, 2013). As the students were asking all their questions, the teacher began to create a web—all the questions the students asked, about the car, the air bag, what happened once cars could not move, etc. The teacher realized all the students were participating in the discussion and the experience was expanded into a lesson that lasted the entire week.

Superintendent Milan spoke to this idea, stating,

> What I see is that the students are learning by asking a lot of questions, which I really appreciate. The students are not being told things, they are actually being engaged to ask questions. They are learning to listen to each other and how to work in groups. Those kinds of skill sets are very vital because it allows students to develop relationships among themselves and to problem solve by themselves. For me those are critical skills to learn. A teacher lecturing to children is not going to teach children those kinds of skills. The students need to be hands-on, they need to talk to each other and even debating each other.

Students being encouraged to ask questions is suggesting a belief that when students are encouraged to develop questioning skills, they are better able to formulate

their own thoughts; thereafter, students can verbalize questions that seek deeper understanding and meaning of a topic. The ability to formulate and articulate questions also reflects a student's opportunity to engage in thoughtful conversation, and as necessary, to debate a given position; in so doing, it develops a student's relational skills (Boyd, 2015; Weiss, 2013). Learning should be fun as described by Principal Alonzo,

> I personally believe that learning equals fun; it can be, and that you [teacher] have your lesson plan but you bring it [to class] you create it and you bring it alive in your classroom where it's fun and engaging and motivating to the students.

Dr. Meraz also added, "Well, I think the teachers [in the video] were very excited about it [the lesson] and it comes off to the children."

When it comes to having fun in the classroom, the administrators suggest that an effective early learning classroom reflects a fun atmosphere. Teachers are prepared for serious work, but they conduct their lessons with an air of fun. Students are engaged and motivated by a fun atmosphere (NAESP, 2015).

The third way, according to the administrators, that teachers can develop student interest is by keeping them active. The age of the children in an early learning classroom, their psycho-social-motor skills development, and their home circumstances combine to a belief that keeping the students active is essential to engaging them and their desire to learn. Children in early learning need opportunities for physical activity during school with outdoor time and opportunities for movement (NAESA, 2010). Superintendent Milan thoroughly articulated the thoughts behind this idea, stating,

> Children in those early primary grades the more active they are the more they are moving is going to help them be more engaged. What I saw in this video was children problem solving really trying to work things out. I thought it was really cute the way they were doing that. For me I saw it be design that is how the teacher laid it out. At this age level you need to do that because it is very hard to keep children sitting still and just lecturing to them, and the younger they are their attention span is much less.

Teachers and administrators need to understand the need for the children to be active throughout the day (Wohlwind & Peppler, 2015; NAESP, 2015; Baraldi, 2008). It is even more important in the case of English Language Learners and high poverty children because in my experience as an administrator I have seen that the children are coming from homes that do not have a lot of space for play and from neighborhoods that at times can be dangerous and constrain the children to stay inside. When administrators visit early learning classrooms, they should feel comfortable in seeing the children maneuvering freely around the classroom.

Administrators collectively agreed on engaging student interest as a fundamental approach to create high quality early learning environments. Once more, they agree on the general concept, but in a subtle manner some of them did not agree in providing the children the conditions to develop this practice. For example, there were divergent opinions on letting children be active to be engaged. It seemed that discipline in a more traditional way outweighed the freedom given to the students in the video as described by

Principal Soto in the following quote. Her comment also seemed to reflect that the children being comfortable and happy meant they were not learning.

> Maybe a little too much comfort, if I put on my teacher hat. Because the student seem very comfortable and very happy, I didn't get a sense of are they being taught, because everything was in the classroom, So how are they in the halls, how are they taught to be in the halls it's good to be orderly. I don't know if that is taught or if there's a need because we only saw the classroom.

Some administrators, such as Principal Torres, shared examples of how they met student interests when they were classroom teachers.

> I remember my last year as a teacher or when I was teaching I had to always use relevant, cultural relevant stories to get their interest or things that I knew that they could relate to like soap operas, I would always use soap operas to explain like a science concept or something in reading.

The only examples given referred to soap operas or television shows as something teachers can use to engage students. Although soap operas and television shows represent a component of the cultural background of Latino students the administrators only used a superficial content to make a connection to the immigrant culture. They did not use more profound and important cultural traits of immigrant children like folk music, painting, religion, ethical and work values as way to foster their interest.

Real World Connections

An important scene in the video prompted the administrators to unanimously agree about bringing real world experiences to the classroom (Boyd, 2015; Urrieta, 2013). The day before filming, the teacher had a minor car accident as she was driving to the school. The following day during the morning circle time, the children wanted to know why she had been absent the previous day. She began talking to the children about the accident and as she saw their interest in asking questions she decided to use it as a central part of her lesson. As they asked questions she created a thinking web to organize their questions and guide them to research some of the answers. She even took it a step further by inviting a tow truck driver to come to the school the next day to demonstrate how a tow truck works. When it came to including real world experiences in the classroom, the administrators conclude that this is an important component of a high quality early learning classroom as confirmed by the following quotes from the administrators.

Effective learning means that students could make connections with the world around them, as asserted by Dr. Meraz, "I would highly encourage teachers to find those opportunities to connect kids to real life experiences because that's how kids learn best, when they connect."

Most administrators thought that teachers could use their personal experiences to create connections between students and the topic. Principal Alonzo mentioned,

> I liked the fact that she shared her own experience about the car accident. The kids got to share what they were doing through a writing exercise, I'm

> assuming, and she also brought an expert to talk about what happens and that is, I think, it's important because sometimes they lose connection with the real world,

And, Dr. Milan supported this idea by adding, "For me I see that as a positive because she took this opportunity to use a subject matter in which students were excited as they were about to go deeper."

Superintendent Milan was at first doubtful when he saw the teacher sharing her story of the car accident yet, he changed his opinion once he saw how the teacher was able to connect the requirements of the state standards to a real-world experience.

> I was a little skeptical when she started and was talking about a personal incident. I prefer that the teacher, quite frankly, is referring to some TEKS. However, she took the lesson all the way through and built vocabulary, and the fact that she showed the children a tow truck, that made me feel more comfortable.

The following day when the teacher invited the tow truck driver to her classroom, the students showed special interest and clearly remained engaged with the lesson as described by Dr. Meraz,

> So when they were sitting outside they were [engaged]; they were engaged because they had a real life, a real world experience in having a tow truck driver present [during the lesson].

While real world experience may be considered important, it is necessary to make sure all students have a point of reference to the experience. As Superintendent Milan observed,

> When you are using personal examples such as a car accident; there are some students who will have a reference to that and some children will not. In my mind I thought about those children who do not have a car because they live in poverty. They know what a car is because they see them on the street but their parents do not actually have a car. So those students do not have a reference; do those students feel disconnected from the lesson if the teacher is not careful. Those are the things I was listening for; how does the teacher make sure that all of her students have some form of reference. If specific vocabulary words are being targeted, how do we make sure that all the students understand the vocabulary? So it is just not the students who have reference to the vocabulary word participating in the lesson it is all the students.

It was not only that students had a point of reference, but that it be a same or similar point of reference; whereby, the lesson is best contextualized. It is contextualized not only by the similar experience but by alleviating as much as possible any academic skills' discrepancy that may exist among students. As Superintendent Milan continues:

> What I would make sure especially in an event like that is that all the students have the same point of reference, so that all the students can become engaged in a similar way because that is the danger you have

> when you have specific incident versus if you read an article about a car accident or a story about a specific event, everyone has a level playing field. The students have the necessary information to make references and arguments. That to me is a strength of the standards that are happening right now around the country and in Texas, they are starting to ground everything on evidence.

Contextualizing the learning experience also includes teachers' recognizing the fact that some students, due to life circumstances, may not be able to relate to the lesson unless it is makes use of relevant situations or events. This is especially true for English language learners who are coming with a different cultural background and consequently may not have the same vocabulary to understand the point of reference (Gonzalez, 2005). As Superintendent Milan describes in the following paragraph,

> So many times what I see from our teachers is that they use references that for them is normal life. However, our teachers are college educated, many of them have master's degrees. So here you are dealing with children who only know the two to three block radius of their neighborhood. That's why I was asking myself, does everybody even have a car? This can make children feel out of place because they do not have anything to add to the conversation. In the video I could not tell because all of the students seemed engaged, they were all interested. So in my mind I am thinking if the students have that common reference, how do you know that? If you are selecting students randomly you really do not know that. For me that's

why it is important because I see the significant inequities just from the lack of exposure.

Real world connections, as it emerged from the administrators' comments, supports the notion that early learning environments are most effective when they make learning relevant to the students' experiences, academic abilities, and life circumstances (Urrieta, 2015; Gonzalez, 2005). It presents a perspective that encourages lesson preparation with the students' background in mind. It asserts that the more a lesson can be situated in real life situations, the more students will be engaged to learn.

Administrators unanimously agreed about bringing real world connections to the classroom as an important learning practice in a high quality early learning classroom; although, some of their response expressed their concern in bringing real world experiences if the students do not have the same point of reference to contextualize the lesson. This concern suggests that the objective is to homogenize the students to one perspective, one way of viewing and understanding the lesson. I argue that the diversity of how students analyze real world experiences is in itself positive and needs to be fostered. Even students life circumstances may preclude them from relating to a lesson, by having exposure to an unknown experience may help them develop their imaginative skills.

In their responses, when administrators related real world experiences to the socio-cultural background of the children, they used examples like soap operas and television shows but they did not bring more important educational concepts related to

the socio-cultural aspect of the Meso- American societies that immigrant children bring from their homes.

Vygotsky (Cole, 1996) indicates that the human environment takes root from the prior generations which have left material or immaterial reference of their activities (Molle-Chamoux, 2015). The learning practices of the ancient Meso-American cultures, has as their central belief many important components of what is described today as the best developmental learning practices (Molle-Chamoux, 2015). For example, learning needs to be student centered. The teacher cannot insert knowledge by themselves. They provide guidance, organize good conditions of apprenticeship, indicate the direction and the goal, serve as a model and protect the learner. Learning in these societies is based on observing the reality of the child by developing attentive engagement and not preventing children to try as well as persuade children to be responsible and adopt a calm attitude for paying attention (Molle-Chamoux, 20015; Rogoff, 1994).

Student Choice

The video showed the opportunity for students to enjoy flexibility in completing activities or fulfilling teacher instructions in a manner that best suites the student and leads to student productivity implies a sense of student control (Wood, 2014; Lansdown, 2005). Students in the classroom were not held accountable to a rigid set of protocols, but allowed to make choices within parameters that effectuated completion of the task at hand. The flexibility, given by the teacher, stimulated an inquisitiveness on the part of the students encouraging the development and use of problem solving skills. As a

consequence, in the video, students are seen asking questions and seeking information, as exemplified by Dr. White's remarks,

> No, no, no, having the kids question more, why am I doing that and so I think I would rather do this instead of this. And as long as the child is going to stay with what the teacher wants, the child can do it his way, but a little bit more open.

According to Principal Charles, the students being inquisitive and exercising choices expanded the opportunity to increase their knowledge base, and encouraged students' confidence in making choices.

> So part of the choices there reflected the kids were interested and they were curious and they wanted to know more. So I think they had a choice there, because the majority of them liked to know more of what had happened so she turned that in. Uh, where else were there choices. They had a choice of asking for help at the very beginning, a little girl didn't know how to write a number 21 and she asked someone and went up there to her teacher. So there was a lot of choice.

The flexibility afforded the students in the classroom environment and its influence on their self-control was evident in student behavior and engagement in the class. The students were seemingly self-directed to remain on-task, and as needed the teacher offered innocuous redirection, as suggested by Superintendent Milan,

> What I saw, even when the students were off task just a little bit, I thought it was perfectly fine, because it did not last very long and the students

came right back. To me there was a trust level that I interpreted between the teacher and the students. I saw that as a positive because students felt comfortable. What I saw were children expanding their problem solving. The children could actually talk things through; you saw a little bit of arguments here and there. What I was thinking about was that random or on purpose, and what I saw made me think it was on purpose; the teacher addressed the issues with the students in a playful way. It made me feel that she structured that on purpose the way it was set up so she could correct the negative behaviors in a meaningful way.

The teacher was purposeful in the strategy utilized to redirect the students, as noted by Superintendent Milan,

> Of course the teacher did that on purpose. That was the teacher way of saying that the students need to resolve these things on their own. I saw students sticking to the task even when they went off topic a little bit they were right back on it. The teacher is teaching the students skills that all of us need to learn. In that sometimes you are working on something, and it is ok to be distracted a little bit but you come right back to it.

Although some administrators talk about liking the video, in the following excerpt this administrator does not believe that the students have the ability to choose what is best for them.

> Well a lot of, well some of what I've seen is that some of our kids don't know some times if you get them to do whatever I mean let them choose

> they stay at that same center or they will go to a center that to them is easier for them depending on where they're struggling that's why we make them purposeful that each center is purposeful and meaningful to their learning if they're just allowed to do whatever they want then we don't get that outcome.

Summary and Reflections

The administrators' perspectives and ideas regarding the most effective ways children learn in early childhood classrooms are consistent with the prevailing conceptual framework of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. My findings revealed an optimistic and homogeneous point of view about best pedagogical practices in high quality early learning classrooms; however, as an administrator who has visited more than 100 classrooms I was concerned because this is not what I have seen in the classrooms, and the current literature attests that these environments and practices are not being offered to Latino immigrant students (Pas, Larson, Reinke, Herman, & Bradshaw, 2016; Colbert, 2010; Adair, 2015; Ford, 2010). There is clearly a difference between what administrators describe as high quality early learning and the actual practice. More than two decades ago studies mentioned this dichotomy within theory and educational practice in the schools (Hatch & Freeman 1988). This dichotomy remains today.

The method I used gave me access only to what they said in their narrative as they answered the interviews, not their conscious or unconscious thinking or feeling (Adair, 2009). But the administrators' views that clearly contradict the reality compelled me to dive more deeply into the analysis to try to understand the complex set of factors that

influence their actions and so give meaning to the answers that they gave (Gee, 2014). To fully understand what the real meaning of their answers, I tried to uncover what may be behind the way the administrators answered. For example, there were hidden or implicit contradictions in their comments, and how their understanding of pedagogy in early learning environments classrooms lack the socio-cultural strengths brought by Latino immigrant students into the schools that were not explicitly recognized by the administrators.

Being that people act in logical ways and because administrators are part of an educational political setting in a school district, it is plausible that administrators were answering thinking for whom they were directing their answers to (Adair, 2009). The participants were answering to people who came from a university. They knew, as part of an education entity, what the "current research" was describing as best practices in schools. It was natural then for administrators to answer what is politically correct. Bakhtin calls this, addressivity-to whom one is speaking (Bakhtin, 1948). Gee (2014) mentions, their responses were given in their own context.

Another possible explanation of why the administrators answered the way they did may be related to the relative importance that early childhood represents for them. At the district level, the proportion of students in early childhood classrooms represent approximately only 10% of their students. Administrators may be more concerned with the performance of the 90% of the students in the district. These districts are usually subject to pressure for underperforming and administrators are faced with the pressure to solve the problem facing the 90% of the students in the district. Administrators may not

recognize that a realistic solution for the problem of the whole district needs to start with developing strong early childhood classrooms. Research has shown that this can improve the performance of the whole district. There are studies that have demonstrated that children whose preschool experience was academically directed earned significantly lower grades compared to children who attended child initiated preschool classes (Marcon, 2002). In addition, studies have shown that when overly academic preschool experiences are introduced too early this has negative effects on the development of the child. Therefore, there is a need for administrators to understand what they should be looking for in a high quality early learning environment.

Administrators who understand and acknowledge that child initiated classrooms lead to better academic performance will enter classrooms with a different perspective and take the risk to push teachers to provide these learning experiences to all children. If administrators view these grades as Prek-3 instead of thinking Prek-K, then this would encompass 30% of their school and propel administrators to place greater emphasis for these students. This supports the idea as to why there is a need for administrators to view the younger years as early learning, which would encompass age 3 to grade 3.

I interviewed administrators at schools and district level. Interviewing district and school administrators was advantageous since valuable information was obtained based on their level and position they held in the school organization (Merriam, 2002). However, there was also a disadvantage, since they were less inclined to take risks and answer in ways that might affect their organization or district.

There is evidence by their answers that administrators had hidden contradictions that gave me a better and more realistic understanding of their real position. It is important to mention that most contradictions that surfaced came from the lower level of the administrators (principals) while the upper level (superintendents) were more consistent.

Ten out of fourteen (71%) of the administrators in the focus groups were Latino immigrants or coming from an immigrant family and some of them also from families of low socio-economic positions. The majority expressed being a Latino student in similar schools and districts that they are now leading. I was expecting that they would include more of their own experiences as Latino students and would also bring up the importance of the positive socio-cultural characteristics that Latino students bring to the classrooms.

Chapter Five: Administrators' Perspectives on Learning Environments in Early Childhood Education

In this chapter, I discuss the perspectives held by administrators regarding high quality learning environments in the early learning years. The participants' responses revealed ways to think or assess early learning environments. The administrators' points of view were consistent with what the current literature says about high quality early learning environments. This similarity of perspectives and the homogeneity of their answers once again was a cause for concern because there is a contradiction between what they are saying and what we are seeing in the classrooms. I will try to find specific nuances to understand this disparity. Finally, I will describe the lack of a socio-cultural perspective in their answers.

The setting of the video used in the study is a first-grade classroom. The video begins with the typical day in the classroom. The children are entering the classroom, talking to each other, laughing with one another, and appear relaxed as they get ready for the school day.

The participant administrators' responses to the film were full with comments regarding the atmosphere of the early learning classroom depicted in the film. Their comments addressed the physical, psychological, and instructional atmosphere that existed—the learning environment. The participants acknowledged and commented how the classroom environment provided the support systems that organized the conditions for learning to occur.

Administrators' responses to the film revealed four main ways to think or assess early learning environments. The first is that structure is an important part of early childhood classrooms. *Structure* as described by the administrators, is a framework set forth by the teacher to establish the way a classroom functions, the process used to organize the classroom, the repetitive activities that occur in the classroom daily and the system to guide movements within the classroom (Feldman, 2010; Hertzog & Kaplan, 2016). Second, the administrators strongly agree that early childhood environments allow children to *make choices* and *self-direct* their learning, at least to some extent (Nievar, Jacobson, Chen, Johnson, & Dier, 2011). Third, a balance of *noise and chaos* is important for early childhood classroom. Noise refers to the fluctuation of sound that occurs throughout the day in the classroom and the administrators' perceptions of whether they viewed it as a positive or negative learning environment. Chaos is included with the word noise because in a natural manner these two elements evoked the administrators to use these two terms repetitively and indistinctly together throughout the interviews (Nievar et al., 2011). Finally, administrators pointed out the importance of specific physical features of the classroom, which includes classroom displays, learning tools, seating arrangements, bulletin boards, and other visual elements (Curtis & Carter, 2005).

Administrators' View of Structure

Several scenes from the video got administrators to reveal their perspectives on structure. Throughout the video, the students were moving about freely, they were not seated in desks, there was a lot of talking among the students. One scene showed the

students seated in circle time, and even during this setting, students got up from the circle without asking permission or given directions to do so. The administrators recognized that certain structures were in place that allowed the students to move about the classroom with that level of noise in a productive manner. They described such things as how quickly students moved and re-settled when it was time to transition from one activity to another, and as one activity ended, the students automatically returned supplies and materials to their appropriate place.

Administrators brought up the issue of structure in the classroom as they discussed the ways in which this classroom functioned, the processes used to organize the classroom, and the systems in place to guide movement within the classroom. The participants valued structure as an important element of the classroom environment because it allows academic freedom to occur (Hertzog & Kaplan, 2016). Dr. Meraz stated,

> I know you keep hearing me say structure; when I say structure, as long as there is some planning that's gone on to know how to get from point A to point B that's what's going to guarantee that the kids are learning; Because that is what allows that academic freedom to occur…Academic freedom appeared to imply the students' confidence and assurance to most importantly move about the classroom to engage in varied learning activities. It suggests an established rhythm; wherein, students possess inherent self-direction to move within the classroom without elaborate

directions, but move from one learning position, activity, or tool to another with purpose.

According to Dr. Meraz, when the student moves from one point to another, demonstrating growth, that guarantees that the child is learning. Therefore, when students are given a variation of learning opportunities with structures in place, the teacher in the video demonstrated that she was able to release the students and gave them academic freedom.

> There was structure in everything that she was doing; like having the kids go to different centers of their choice, awesome, I highly encourage that. I felt that there was always a rhyme and reason why she was doing what she was doing. Once a teacher has established routines and a structured classroom the benefits are then passed to the students. With [academic] freedom you need internal structure.

Administrators agreed for structures to be most effective, routines are established early in the school year. The administrators acknowledged that the video was filmed on Nov. 11, which implied sufficient time had passed since the beginning of the school year to allow students to become familiar with classroom routines and structure. The administrators accepted that the teacher in the film set the expectations for the classroom early on in the year, as noted by Principal Charles, "We tell our teachers you are going to get what you expect from kids. The structure and the expectations that you set in the first two weeks of school will determine how the rest of the school year will go." Principal Soto also commented on this idea stating,

> In pre-k 3 & 4 we really work on the structure piece to get the students to understand to be independent, how to work in a group, and how to transition to the various learning stations. I think the earlier you get students to develop transitional skills, the easier it is when they get older.

The administrators are telling us that an effective practice for all teachers is to set their expectations and structure for the classroom early in the year (Curtis & Carter, 2005).

In the video, the students were shown working in different areas in the classroom, such as sitting under tables; there appeared to be a lot of flexibility in where and how students worked. One scene showed students getting into a line to leave the classroom. The teacher did not direct students to get into a perfect line, or "have a bubble in your mouth," she only directed students to look forward, and the students moved without incident. One administrator, Principal Torres, was prompted by the apparent flexibility to comment and add understanding to the meaning of structure, acknowledging that structure and rigidity are not synonymous, commenting, "Structure and rigidity are a different. I mentioned both. To me a very structured classroom is when routines are in place. Transitions are tight."

Principal Torres continues by describing what rigidity looks like in a classroom in her school. This allows us to understand the difference between *structure* and *rigidity*.

> Right now I am thinking of a teacher at my school who is very rigid and tight. When you stand up you must put your chair in. When you line up, you must face east. She also makes notes as the students are walking

down the hall, really keeping them in shape. She is hyper-monitoring the movement of her students.

This allows us to understand the difference between structure and rigidity. The teacher described by Principal Torres established rigidity but not structure in her classroom whereas the teacher in the video clearly has established structure in her classroom but not *rigidity*.

Another scene showed how the teacher did not have rigidity as a way to establish structure. In the scene, the teacher is talking to the students with a small standing chalkboard by her side; all but one of the students was seated in a circle on the carpet in front of her. A girl was standing behind the chalkboard and occasionally peeked out to see the teacher, and the teacher allowed this. For this teacher, eye contact was not something she required from her students. This scene provoked two divergent reactions from the administrators.

One group believed that direct eye contact student-to-teacher was evidence that students were attentive and engaged. They described "one, two, three, eyes on me" as best practice to ensure students were attentive to teacher. Principal Alonzo shared, "At least have their eyes on her if they're listening because if they're doing something else, are they really listening to what she is saying.

The other group of participants believed that direct student-to-teacher eye contact did not necessarily imply students' attentiveness; more important was establishing the structure and routine, and witnessing students' behaviors and practices as evidence that

they were engaged and an effective learning environment existed. Dr. White described the "eyes on me" as an element of control from the teacher.

> Everyone needs to be quiet, I am not going to start until you are all quiet, all my eyes are here. Giving students step by step instructions. The teacher [in the film] is not doing this. The teacher is not spending and wasting time on going through list of instructions, instead she is developing the routines as she goes (Example: "Stop, turn, talk.").

This is important for administrators to understand because when they go into early childhood classrooms to assess student engagement, administrators need to understand that not all eyes will be on the teacher and this does not imply that students are not engaged (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

Finally, administrators offered an important reflection about providing professional development to train new teachers in routine and structure implementation practices. As Superintendent Hernandez stated:

> I think structure begins with staff development. I would take a first-year teacher and have them spend time with other teachers who have been teaching for two or three years, and have experience. This allows the first-year teacher to grow, and become an effective teacher a lot sooner.

In general, the administrators' comments parallel what the literature tells us about structure in the classroom. Designing effective classroom environments that are engaging includes providing rules, rituals, and routines. Children like predictability (Bovey & Strain, 2003).

Freedom to Talk and to Move

One of the most evident features of the classroom environment that the video captures is the way in which the students appear to have the freedom to talk and the freedom to move. The video shows some students sitting and reading under the table while others are reading while seated on pillows. Some students are sitting in a desk, and other students are working on math and moving around the room to use the charts that will help them complete their work. There is freedom to move about the room. There is a freedom to talk. This does not apply only when they are in a whole-group setting, but also at other times when students are working with one another. They can all talk at the same time. The teacher does not direct students to stop talking, she only monitors to ensure the students are listening to each other. She does not try to quiet them, or stifle their creativity and enthusiasm. The environment she has created makes the students very comfortable to discuss and ask questions to one another and to her (Curtis & Carter, 2005; Hertzog & Kaplan, 2016).

Administrators interviewed unanimously agreed upon and recognized the importance of having a learning environment where children demonstrated the freedom to talk and move about the classroom. Specific to this sense of freedom to talk and move about is the notion that students have seized opportunities to be self-directed in their learning, they feel safe to express themselves. In essence, participants acknowledged the importance of students' developing their capacity to make choices. Dr. Meraz noted,

> The kids feel comfortable. They feel comfortable to be able to share their ideas, there is not going to be any repercussion 'because I said the wrong

answer,' I don't feel [the students felt hesitant] at all from the lesson [in the film].

The teacher had established classroom routines where students knew what was expected of them as they spoke with one another, or with the teacher. These routines allowed a sense of safety and freedom to talk and share. Dr. Meraz discussed the positive effects of well-established routines in the following excerpt:

> So, [for example], if I have them up close and personal and I am beginning a topic of discussion, then whatever leading questions I have, I have an opportunity for them to discuss them and they would automatically know that when I say 'turn to your partner' [the students know what to do next].

Principal Torres noted, "The students are not expected to be quiet; they are allowed to have discussions and conversations."

The freedom encouraged students to enter conversations with one another as a problem-solving skill. During the video, for example, there was one scene where two boys were having a conflict, and the teacher directs them to get together, talk-it-out, and find a solution. As Dr. White mentioned, "The students are trying to solve their own problems through conversations and thought. This is what we want students to do."

The teacher maintained control of the classroom, but it was done in such a way that empowered the students to build their own confidence and practice to learn in a participatory fashion. This notion was captured by Superintendent Hernandez's comments:

> Although she spoke with some [students at the beginning] that were coming up to her a lot, [the others] were taking it on their own. They were asking each other; at the very beginning they were asking each other how to figure it out.

The confidence that the teacher builds reflect the teacher's professional capacity, as noted by Superintendent Hernandez who commented, "I believe highly effective teachers have a way to get their students engaged in conversation."

Dr. White viewed this as a developing skill that will serve the student throughout their educational and life experiences.

> They were developing the confidence to be able to speak in front of large groups. I did not speak in front of a group until the 10th grade. Those are advantages that her students had in developing that level of confidence and comfort for public speaking. They are developing the skills for public speaking early.

Creating the freedom, the atmosphere, where students feel confident and willing to be self-directed is not an easy task it requires planning and strategic effort on the teacher's part. Superintendent Milan stated,

> It is a lot of work, but if teachers do it well and they develop an environment where kids feel safe to open up and talk because they are respected and there is no wrong answer; in such an environment, that is real learning….For me seeing the students connecting to the lesson, their use of explicit vocabulary, and also the fact that the students were talking was a huge positive. I love to see the building of vocabulary significantly

> at this age level because one thing that worries me is that there are some children that have support at home so they have a richer vocabulary [but so many others do not]. This open environment for conversations increases language development.

The freedom to move and to talk was considered essential for the early learning classroom. The administrators expressed how the students' freedom to move around the classroom was connected to students being engaged, thus promoting age appropriate learning. This sentiment was captured by Superintendent Milan, who stated, "[for] children in those early primary grades, the more active they are [and] the more they are moving, [this] is going to help them be more engaged."

Superintendent Milan commented on how the students in the film were moving about the classroom with little direction,

> [You can tell the students know the classroom protocols by] the fact that the children are doing so many group activities [without directions]. The children are problem solving with each other. You rarely saw this teacher doing any lecturing. Everything was very hands-on, and the routines were generally pretty smooth. You see very few transitions, and from what I saw they were pretty smooth.

Superintendent Milan further elaborated on this notion of freedom to move by commenting, "[T]hroughout the video the students were engaged. I like the fact that the students were moving around and not just standing still. The students were also doing multiple activities; I really enjoyed that."

Principal Torres describes why this freedom to move was so important to the classroom in the video.

> First graders are wiggly worms. In particular, the class in the video were very wiggly they were very loose. It was clear that her desire to create a community that was comfortable where kids were able to interact and it was not tight.

The administrators' responses to freedom to talk and to move parallel what the literature tells us about creating an appropriate learning environment in early childhood (Edwards, 2000). Young children learn best in environments that are physically and emotionally safe and that provide opportunities for self-directed learning, exploration, and intentional, focused teaching (NAESP, 2005).

Challenges to Freedom to Talk and to Move. One of the nuances found in this section is figuring out why the freedom to speak for early childhood classrooms for Latino immigrant students have an implicit message of deficit as reflected in the following response from Principal Soto:

> That [freedom to speak] is very important, but I think it's our duty, our responsibility, our obligation as a teacher to teach [the students] how to engage in conversation; even if it's just a popcorn type [activity], because there are different types that the students can be engaged in.

The administrator believes the adult needs to teach students how to speak. Does that mean that children do not know how to communicate?

Given this, I was expecting in their answers that they would include more of their own experiences and bring up the importance of the socio-cultural characteristics that Latino students bring to the classroom. When they describe freedom to talk and to move, they did not mention that Latin cultures are talkative but at the same time extremely respectful of authority (Rogoff, 1994) and consequently easier for the teacher to manage the classroom. They give all the merit to the teacher for establishing the freedom to move and talk in the classroom, merit which she deserves, but they do not acknowledge what the students bring inherently from their culture may help the interactions the children have in the classroom

Noise and Chaos

Administrators pointed out numerous examples of the freedom to move and talk in the video and used noise and chaos in an indistinctively way to describe the behavior of the children in the classroom. The administrators considered *noise* and even *chaos* as activities and behaviors that demonstrate learning is taking place.

Although they mention the need to identify the difference between constructive (positive) or destructive (negative) chaos as Superintendent Alvarez describes,

> One of the things that you have to be very, I guess, observant [of], is whether the chaos is destructive chaos or constructive chaos. And obviously from here [the film] it was constructive chaos" because what was happening there was a lot of dialogue. The children were talking by themselves and not with her.

He identified that it was constructive chaos because all the talking was related to one idea or concept that was related to the lesson. So, this tells us when an administrator enters a classroom where there is a lot of talking going on, she should focus if the conversation is about the lesson or just talking in general.

Superintendent Milan continues to helps us understand with the film that the classroom was chaotic in a good way because even though there was a lot of movement there was not a lot of wasted time in transitions.

> There was not a lot of wasted time on transitions. The students know the rules and expectations. The teacher does not have to remind the students; [only] every once in a while did she have to remind the students about very minimal things.

This tells us that when an administrator enters a classroom where there is a lot of movement, what she needs to focus on the teacher's ability to transition the group without wasting too much time.

Administrators placed an important value on noise in the classroom as a measure that the children are learning, as Principal Torres describes in the following,

> In some instances, a very quiet early childhood classroom can arouse suspicion and concern. In such an environment I do not mind chaos that is the kind of chaos I want because that is real learning. I get very nervous and scared when I see a quiet classroom. In those classrooms it is hard to tell if children are learning or not. It will surprise you when you compare

assessment results of a quiet classroom to a noisy classroom. Very interesting results.

When administrators talk about noise and chaos again they do not recognize that in the Latino culture making noise in a group setting is not necessarily bad. Think about a Mexican or Italian dinner table and this clearly evident. Their answers do not put emphasis on socio-cultural characteristics that the students bring from their home (Gomez, Nussbaum, Weitz, Lopez, Mena, & Torres, 2013).

Physical Aspect of the Classroom Environment

The physical aspect of the classroom is the last of the four findings to be considered when identifying effective early childhood classroom environments. Classroom displays, learning tools, seating arrangements, bulletin boards, and other physical and visual elements are an important part of the early childhood environment. Throughout the video, while delivering a lesson, the teacher consistently used visuals and anchor charts to explain and guide the students through their learning. The visuals were used to show students the process of thinking, such as the chart she used to illustrate what makes a good reader (Curtis & Carter, 2005). Viewing this prompted the administrators to discuss what was important in the physical environment, as noted by Superintendent Milan,

> The other thing I learned was use of visuals throughout the classroom. Especially around vocabulary words and different diagrams. Visuals are really important for this age group. I have been in classrooms were

> literally all the walls were full of vocabulary words and all the different diagrams.

Principal Alonzo commented on physical environment by stating,

> What I have seen in terms of really strong classrooms for English language learners is a huge emphasis on literacy so a lot of reading, and a lot of visuals around vocabulary. So that it is really explicit across the board. So that the students get really comfortable.

The comments that were shared recognized the academic content of the physical elements, they did not reflect on the style by which the physical elements were displayed. This was exemplified in the final comment, made by Principal Alonzo, which was not directly related to the film but to the participant's own experience:

> [T]he teacher that I observed yesterday, in her room she had a lot of print a lot of vocabulary things that students could refer to so when she was instructing. If the student was stuck in a vocabulary didn't know what to say they immediately knew to go to the anchors. They knew how to use them it was amazing. Teachers just put things up for show but these kids were actually taught to use whatever words that were put up on the walls.

The administrators' responses showed that the physical aspect of the classroom should include a lot of words. Implicitly they said that a classroom that showed a lot of words for them was a positive learning environment. It seems to me that they are saying that immigrant students need to be exposed to many words. Their comments are

following the current education trend that argues that immigrant children enter the school with a word deficit (Hart & Risley, 1995).

The participants did not mention that what is important is not learning a certain number of words but the ability of children to relate the words they know to something that is meaningful to them. For immigrant children, the use of words related to their culture needs to be seen as something positive and visible in the classroom. This implies that the classroom should not be decorated with commercial charts but instead charts or posters, which foster the use of their own words displayed. By doing this, their culture and what they bring from home is acknowledged and incorporated in the process of learning (Johnson, 2015).

Summary and Reflection

For classrooms, creating an appropriate learning environment is critical (Edwards, 2000). Young children learn best in environments that are physically and emotionally safe and that provide opportunities for self-directed learning, exploration, and intentional, focused teaching (NAESP, 2005). The administrators in the study acknowledged how the classroom environment provided the support systems that organized the conditions for learning to occur.

Administrators brought up the issue of structure, the processes used to organize the classroom, and the systems in place to guide movement within the classroom. The participants value structure because it allows academic freedom to occur. Finally, the administrators place important attention to professional development to train new teachers in routine and structure implementation practices.

The administrators recognized the importance of having freedom to talk and move about the classroom developing their capacity to make choices (Adair, 2014). The freedom to speak encouraged students to enter conversations with one another as a problem-solving skill. Freedom to move around the classroom was connected to students being engaged, thus promoting age appropriate learning.

The administrators in the study offered different perspectives that consider *noise* and *chaos* as activities and behaviors that demonstrate learning is taking place. They recognized there are two sides to chaos. The positive noise and chaos implies that there is not a lot of wasted time and the students knowing what are the expectations for the classroom allowing the teacher to recapture the students' attention quickly.

Finally, the administrators described the classroom displays, learning tools, seating arrangements, bulletin boards, and other physical and visual elements as an important part of the early childhood environment.

Similar to chapter four, their answers were consistent with the prevailing conceptual framework offered by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). They reflected a lack of cultural situatedness and the dominance of the cultural free notion of best practices (Adair, 2009).

Administrators did not include their own experiences in their answers nor brought up the importance of the socio-cultural characteristics that Latino students bring to the classroom. When they describe freedom to talk and to move, they did not mention that Latin cultures are talkative but at the same time extremely respectful of authority (Rogoff, 1994). They do not acknowledge what the

students bring inherently from their culture may help the interactions the children have in the classroom.

When administrators talk about noise and chaos, again they do not recognize that in the Latino culture making noise in a group setting is not necessarily bad. Think about a familiar Mexican or Italian dinner table, where multiple conversations are taking place at the same time, and there is no intention of disrespect from one conversation to another, and this becomes evident. Their answers do not put emphasis on socio-cultural characteristics that the students bring from their home.

Another area of concern is figuring out why the freedom to speak for early childhood classrooms for Latino immigrant students have an implicit message of deficit in their response. The administrators believe the adult needs to teach students how to speak. It is important to recognize that children do need to be guided on how to communicate, what we need to consider is what language patterns is the school system trying to reinforce. The language patterns that are being fostered in the current education arena, tend to be the dominant discourse which is not necessarily the language patterns appropriate for immigrants.

The administrators' responses showed that the physical aspect of the classroom should include a lot of words. Implicitly, they are saying that immigrant students need to be exposed to many words. Their comments are following the current education trend that argues that immigrant children enter the school with a word gap (Hart & Risley, 1995). Their answers reflect their lack of cultural situatedness (Adair, 2009) and the dominant notion that English is best practice because they do not recognize the

supportive linguistic and cognitive development that take place in immigrant homes (Johnson, 2015).

They did not mention that what is important is not learning a certain number of words but the ability of children to relate those words to something that is meaningful to them. By doing this, their culture and what they bring from home is acknowledged and incorporated in the process of learning (Johnson, 2015).

Chapter Six: Administrator perspectives on influential factors on early learning

In the last two chapters I shared the results of how administrators viewed high quality early childhood education relating to the learning environment and the pedagogical practices that take place in the classroom. While the teacher may possess the capacity to create an effective early learning environment, and to deliver appropriate pedagogical methods, the administrators also recognized that there are external factors that influence early learning classroom. They focused on these factors that influence early learning classrooms: the influence of administrators and the influence of standardization and high stakes testing.

Administrators as the instructional leader have a tremendous amount of influence on the classrooms (Neumann & Bennett, 2001; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). They establish a purposeful direction, the vision to create effective learning environments, systems to ensure that the classroom work is aligned to this vision and supervise the implementation of the systems.

The second influential factor was standardization and high-stakes testing. This is a dominant force in the current public educational environment and thus affects directly on the administrators' decisions on curriculum and instruction (Bauml, 2016).

The Influence of Administrators

Administrators agreed that they have significant influence on what occurs in the classrooms. The lens through which the administrators viewed the ECE classroom was given by their role and position—how a building principal considered ECE classrooms was different from how a central office administrator viewed the same classroom.

I learned the importance the group placed on the role of the top administrators as instructional leaders as noted by Principal Smith. “The main person, the superintendent is an instructional leader.”

The administrators’ influence on curriculum and instruction was noted as a shift from historical practice, as mentioned by Principal Smith who commented,

> And one of the transformations that I have started to see in the last couple of years since Dr. Alvarez came in as superintendent is you have to be an instructional leader. You can’t be a manager; you can’t have your curriculum facilitators taking care of curriculum and instruction.

The focus on curriculum and instruction represents a purposeful direction, a vision, and their answers revealed that participants considered it imperative for all administrators and teachers to remain committed to the vision to create effective learning environments.

Their responses suggest that the alignment of practice with vision is predicated on developing a commitment to the vision at every level of a district’s organizational structure. The vision is established by the superintendent and it becomes incumbent upon each subsequent level of the organization to ensure the vision is made clear through practice. For example, as mentioned by Principal Soto, the superintendent sets the standard and establishes expectations for principals, who in-turn establish expectations for teachers, “What makes it more consistent for myself as an administrator is to have alignment among the teachers in the classrooms.” Dr. Meraz mentioned, “Making sure that we are all headed the same direction at the same time, that is why you have to have a

lot of tighter structures as far as what's happening." This idea of tighter structure contradicts with the recommended practice of giving freedom to the teachers to choose their own teaching practice (Norris, 2010).

Contingent on the vision are the systems, which serve to ensure the work is aligned with the vision, and on a campus the one responsible to implement and monitor the systems is the principal. Dr. Alvarez captured this idea by stating,

> One of the things that I told them from the beginning at the principals meeting is, you are my gatekeepers. I was very clear about that. Principals, you are my gatekeepers. The only way that this is going to be successful is that you at the campus are going to help me get it to the teacher level. I can't be out there. I can do all the videos in the world, I can visit as many classrooms as possible but the principal is the one there at the campus that is seen on a daily basis so I told them, you are my gatekeepers.

Aligning practice with the vision requires a system; wherein, alignment is monitored and validated, or where necessary, situations that require remediation are identified and appropriate action taken. It requires supervision. The need for supervision is a commonly shared value; however, the form and structure of monitoring, of supervising, varies for administrators, and in the current educational climate, so much of what is being supervised is based on students' academic performance data, as mentioned by Principal Torres,

> Again it is case by case; how good is the teacher's data. If you see that there is growth and that kids are progressing, and that is a style that works for that teacher; who am I to say you need to follow the traditional way, you need to do it this way.

Dr. Meraz added, "Administrators prefer to give teachers freedom in the classroom but it is tempered by student outcomes, I am trying to settle in the middle, where yeah, you have the freedom to do this but prove to me that it's working."

Administrators' responses include conditional statements. Administrators agree to give teachers freedom in the classroom but it is tempered by students' outcomes. Teachers are allowed freedom in the classroom as long as students meet performance objectives. These conditional statements reflect the weight given by administrators to the open-market/neoliberal vision (Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Salinas & Reidel, 2007) of accountability represented by their interest to produce higher academic test scores and standardization (Bachara & Mundell, 1993). In the conflict between the supporters of the ideological goal of academic skills and knowledge and those advocating equity in learning, the administrators implicitly are advocating the open-market/neoliberalism logic of action.

In various instances, cross supervision, sharing the supervision experience with a colleague, is considered a good practice. Cross supervision provides an opportunity to

gather more than one perspective on a classroom and encourages professional growth through conversations among those supervising. According to Dr. White,

> It is so important for principals to do joint walk throughs with the assistant superintendents because that is an opportunity to collaborate. The principal might see something different than the assistant superintendent. After the walk through, the principal and the assistant superintendents can have conversations on what they saw in the classrooms.

Administrators implied that certain attributes, characteristics, behaviors, and practices must be evidenced in a classroom if the classroom is to be considered effective. For example, Superintendent Hernandez supervises by being present in the schools as much as possible.

> Every day I spend a half a day in schools (hallways, classroom, school yards, etc.) That is where I got to be at. When I go into a classroom I look at student engagement, transition, student learning, and visuals.

And, other administrators like Superintendent Milan consider the situation and context before making an evaluation on the quality of the lesson, by commenting,

> I walk into a lot of classrooms--where the students are paying attention, where they are sitting still and being quiet, or sometimes they are little bit fidgety. That is more compliance than engagement.

He is telling us that when an administrator walks into a room he must assess the whole environment of the classroom. For him a quiet classroom is not

necessarily a place where children are learning. He continues describing how speaking is important to see when an administrator walks into a classroom.

> When the children are discussing something, they are working in groups. That is what I liked about the teacher in the video. This is important especially at this grade level because of the social skills that the students are still developing.

Dr. White commented on the responsibility of an administrator, who must be aware of what the students are learning to make a correct assessment of the classroom and thus provide valuable feedback to the teacher, commenting,

> So the way you do it is you have to be in the classrooms often enough to know what the students are supposed to be working on. You need to really listen to the level of questioning that is going on. You need to have conversations with students. You need to look at data from assessments and analyze that at a deep level. From that be able to provide feedback to the teacher. Engagement is something that you can just go in on one visit and be able to say that the students are highly engaged.

It seems that this administrator is telling us that in order to give meaningful feedback to the teacher administrators need to have a deeper understanding of what is going on in the classroom, determined by the level of engagement of the children not only in a single visit but looking at the student developing through time, measuring learning by the advancement of the child.

On the other hand, Principal Torres adds to the previous administrator's comments, and states it is unfair to make a judgment in one visit.

> As an administrator you start making judgment when you walk into a classroom. It is so unfair because it is a snapshot. We have to take each class and each teaching style one by one and not compare because at the end of the day we want kids to be learning and thriving in whatever environment that they are in as long as it is safe and conducive to learning.

This administrator is telling us that they need to view their school as a classroom where each teacher is like a student. They need to understand that each teacher, like students who have different styles of learning, will have a different style of teaching. Teachers must be allowed the freedom to develop their own method of teaching.

Dr. White added that administrators are concerned with teacher effectiveness and student learning by stating,

> I think they [administrators] have a tremendous amount of influence. I think it is how you have the conversation with the teachers, and if the teacher is open to listening and willing to observe other teachers who are doing it at a higher level hopefully they can learn. We need to learn how to coach a teacher up or coach them out. If the teacher is resistant and not willing to listen and it is affecting the students' learning it is the responsibility of the administrator to do something about it.

This administrator is trying to tell us that their influence on the classroom is related to their ability to identify strong teachers who can be observed by teachers who need improvement. He also mentions that administrators need to be prepared to coach teachers and if they are unwilling to change their practices they need to guide them out of the classroom. Dr. White's statement allows us to understand that the influence of the administrator lies either in the leader achieving consensus or through their power to take corrective actions (Neumann & Bennett, 2001).

Fundamental to supervision is its function to assess if learning is taking place in the classroom. The data suggests that when observing a classroom, administrators assess if learning is going on by using various techniques; these may include the administrator's direct engagement with the students or noting how the teacher engages with the students as described by Assistant Principal Chavez,

> …it can be misleading because a student might not understand the instruction because the task does not seem aligned, so to see if the instruction and the task are aligned you go with the kids and ask them, what are you doing? What are you learning today?

Principal Alonzo added,

> Well, we go into the classroom we don't just look, we don't just sit there, we actually engage with the kids, we talk to the kids; like if they're doing math and they're doing counting and sorting you sit with them and ask them what they are doing today; if they can verbalize what they are doing

or the task or the different things, that's how we do it on a daily basis, as well as reviewing some formative assessment results.

Dr. White compared current classroom conditions with those witnessed during previous observations, as another way to assess the occurrence of learning.

> I think you need to go in and think about the results the last time you saw the students. Are the teachers teaching to the areas that the students need. How are the students responding? A lot of it you can [identify as you] look at the dynamics of the relationships between the teacher and the students. That is easier to pick up...the responses from the kids, and the level of respect and motivation. So if you are not seeing that you know that they are some issues.

The data revealed that supervision, while necessary, serves no purpose if it does not acknowledge effective practices or promote growth. Supervision needs to be documented and must necessarily be constructive as described by Superintendent Milan,

> First you need to be constructive and approach the teacher in a positive way. If the teacher is open to working then the principal does everything that they can to help them. If they are resistant and they are not putting students first then it is a different conversation.

In addition to the influence of administrators through supervision, they also influence practice through the time they schedule for teachers to plan and prepare instruction, as well as the expectations for how planning time is to be used as noted by

Principal Sanchez, "Give teachers plenty of time to plan and prepare, so they could come up with those engaging and meaningful lessons."

The effectiveness and value of professional development offerings was considered important by the administrators in the focus group as a mechanism for promoting growth. Professional development is formulated for various reasons, such as training for the implementation of a new initiative or improving current conditions. As Superintendent Alvarez discussed,

> The one thing that we were very careful about was the implementation. We did a lot of training. We had a Tech Day at the very beginning of the school year during staff development, everybody, I'm talking about cafeteria workers, custodians, security guards, everybody had some kind of technology training. Because the way we believe, is that every single employee in the district is a stakeholder in the child's education.

Superintendent Alvarez's comment tells us that he considers every member of the district as being involved in supporting student learning. He includes everyone in the vision and in the professional development training.

Superintendent Hernandez described one way they use their own staff to provide professional development.

> Some of the things that we train our teachers to do during staff development [is done] by videoing some of our highly effective teachers and using those videos during staff development. We bring in teachers that had high success rates with their students to help with training.

Sharing videos of highly effective teachers is similar to what Dr. White recommended about matching effective teachers with those needing improvement. The advantage of filming a video is that it can be used in multiple occasions and with a wider audience.

Professional development is not only included in a day training but also in professional learning communities, mentoring and coaching models that will help increase student engagement. Administrators also shared another form of professional development offered by instructional coaches. These individuals are highly effective teachers, or retired educators who go into the classrooms to assess and provide feedback to the teachers. Principal Soto commented,

> We have instructional coaches at each campus that offer critique, feedback, and follow up. Many new teachers like having an instructional coach on campus based on feedback from end of the year surveys.

Administrators placed an important emphasis on professional development. Yet the current practice reflects that districts assign more resources to boxed curriculum versus investing in human capital (Bauml, 2016). The amount of responses prompted by the focus groups suggest that the influence of administrators at all levels of the district must be acknowledged as impacting the early childhood classroom (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). The superintendent, central office administrators, and principals each in their own way influence the ECE classroom. The administrators influence the early childhood classrooms by establishing the district's vision, exercising the necessary supervision, and fostering professional development.

The administrator is the best-positioned person in every school to ensure successive years of quality teaching for each child. Administrators also influence the classroom by choosing the best teachers and developing them and also they are given the task of releasing them when they are not effective (Darling-Hammond ; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Walhlstrom, 2004).

The administrators in the study and the current literature tell us that they have a significant influence over what happens in the classroom. After I finished analyzing the data, I realized there was an important question that the administrators did not answer so I went back to ask: If you enjoyed the classroom so much and described it as a high quality early childhood classroom why are we not seeing these environments in the schools. Their answers reflected a certain blame placed on teachers by the administrators. Superintendent Meraz stated,

> She really set up a classroom in such a way that children are speaking about things that are relevant. The children are still on task, and that they are learning from each other. I am making a lot of assumptions, but I can see that the teacher has been doing this for a while and she has built this by design. I have not found this to be the norm.

Dr. White also placed the blame on the teacher and commented,

> I think it is insecurity on the part of the teachers and a lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers. I think a lot of teachers it is not like they want their students to be unsuccessful. A lot of time they do not have a deep understanding about why they have to do things in a certain way for kids to create their knowledge.

> With that said it is very easy when things are not going smoothly to revert back to what we know and to revert back to taking control.

Principal Torres places the blame on the curriculum management department from central office as being the ones that constraint teachers from applying best practices in their classroom.

> The district does. The departments that put the curriculum together are out of touch with time that is required to teach any concept because they are so far remove from the actual classroom. If you think about, it no matter how well you plan a lesson, there is always going to be real life situations. Kids are going to come in late. Kids are going throw a tantrum. Kids are going to be at tug of war with each other. All those things require the teacher attention.

At no point, did the participants take responsibility for being the most important player in supporting teachers to apply these practices in the classroom or to give them the adequate professional development to strengthen their practice. Administrators did not recognize that they were the ones who have the power to change this dichotomy.

This apparent contradiction reflects that their answers about the best practices in ECE were given in their role within the district (micro-political view). Their answers reflected a logic of distributed justice focused on goals of equity and the development of cognitive and socio-emotional skills. But in reality, their actions play a part in the macro-political relations with the state and federal governments where they in practice,

implemented the logic of bureaucratic accountability-goals of excellence and high academic test scores and means- standardization and supervision.

The Influence of State Standards and High Stakes Testing

Administrators revealed that while there are many influencers on the early learning classroom, standardization and high stakes testing is a dominant force. The current public educational environment, at all levels, operates with an awareness that failure to meet standards as measured by performance on the high stakes test can affect schools or individual staff (Feldman, 2010). Despite the fear the testing evoked, the administrators acknowledged that the standards serve good purpose to guide and measure effective and equitable instructional opportunities. The standards as evidence of learning was further discussed by Dr. Meraz,

> When you look at it, no matter what, that drives everything in a public school system. No matter what, depending on the grade level that they are at in the content there's a certain prescription of TEKS that have to be taught and they end up being pre-requisites of one another, depending. As long as the teacher has an idea, a structured idea or she has it mapped out.

The standards provide a baseline, a framework, from which administrators assessed the evidence of learning; this was acknowledged by Superintendent Milan as occurring in the film.

> Again I just prefer something that was grounded. That would be a comfort level for me knowing that it is based on the standards, and on the TEKS. I trust the teacher in the video because I believe she is a strong teacher,

however when you have a weak teacher that becomes their whole day. All they do is talk about stories and it is not tied to anything. I had a lot of comfort with the teacher in the video. I felt that she knew her students…For me this teacher [in video] appears to be able to follow the standards. To me it does not matter about the lesson for that day, but the lesson has to be tied to the standards and the standards must be relevant for that particular time period. You can skip around if you are building vocabulary and comprehension and allowing kids to acquire. That to me is more important.

Superintendent Milan continues with the same idea,

> I just remember in the late 90's when the standards were implemented that there was a lot of fighting about the standards, and there still are fights about the alignment of the standards. The reason that the standards were put in place was because especially with high poverty children, teachers could be very random. Then you have these disparities among those children. When I look at the new standards even in Texas everyone one is coming back into being more grounded with the TEKS and evidence of learning.

The responses reflect that the administrators are placing a significant weight to standardization, especially for high poverty children. In this last vignette, this administrator stated that twenty years ago, the education system decided to implement standards to close the gap or disparities, as he described.

Yet, after 20 years of standardization there has not been improvement in closing the gap (Fuller, 2007) but clearly, standardization has not worked.

Administrators agreed that the high stakes test creates undue amount of stress among educators. The inherent consequences of failure to meet standards produces stress among educators; wherein, creativity and freedom in teaching is stifled. They agree that in the ECE environment this stress is not necessarily felt, since the high stakes more directly affect intermediate grades and beyond as described in the following vignette by Principal Charles,

> And the stress comes from state assessments of course. So, in a school such as ours where the scores aren't where the teachers want them to be um, then there are more stressors on grade levels that have black and white reports, that would be third, fourth, and fifth. All teachers want to feel successful and if the measure is the state test, the state assessments then that's what they are striving to produce.

Principal Charles is telling us that both the punishment (stress) and the incentive are directed towards teaching to the state assessments and she continues by mentioning that this stress is not felt in the lower grades,

> Not in this case [ECE], but unfortunately, we have that system in the intermediate grade levels and we don't have that type of assessment in the primary grade levels so the teachers don't internalize that. Okay this is what the product has to be so my teaching, I am going to make my

> teaching try and mirror that. So, that's why I think there is more leniency in the teachers' attitudes in the primary grade levels.

It seems that this administrator is telling us that the practices of high stakes testing need to be brought down to the early childhood grades so that teachers mirror their instruction to the assessment. When she mentions that there is more leniency for early childhood classrooms she makes it seem like the work that early childhood teachers are now doing is an easy job. Her response reflects the low regard she has for the early childhood teachers.

Although some administrators did reflect a tone of flexibility and allowing teachers to exercise their creativity, they always conditioned this to ensuring that the State standards were being met. For example, Dr. White stated, "[as long as they are] tied to the skills that they are trying to develop, and standards that they are trying to meet.'

Administrators were willing to accept teachers' personal style and encourage different ways of presenting information, but not at the expense of the content, as Principal Torres stated,

> Depending on what her TEKS was, what was she expected to teach that day? I am not the traditional administrator. I do not expect teachers to be teaching a particular lesson at a particular time. I take it case by case. I try not to judge. If I see something really off I have a conversation with that teacher immediately. When you consider how broad our TEKS are and

when you consider the grade level, there is a whole lot that you have to consider.

Adding to the evolution of testing, Dr. Alvarez commented that there are different ways to assess students that are not necessarily focused on the paper and pencil tests.

It's kind of like today of presenting the assessments the different types of assessments. You don't necessarily have to do the paper and pencil. Give them a choice, they can come up with the web, they can come up with a project, they come up with a little script as long as they are going to be addressing the; give them the limits you know, the criteria you want them to address and then for them to come up with their own idea to present the concept to the teacher and then they really will tell you whether they learned it or not.

Administrators noted the importance of their role in deescalating stress among teachers; despite the varied external forces, administrators can influence the degree to which stress is experienced. Principal Charles stated,

The teachers are feeling stressed and if you are putting that much pressure on them to get products turned in or certain scores and the teacher is not used to or comfortable in doing then you are not going to get them to do it. You have to set it up to where you got to take out some of those stressors or pressures if you will.

The data suggests that standardization and high stakes tests greatly influence the learning environment. While the effects of high stakes testing may not be felt in the ECE

environment as much as at higher grade levels, there is nonetheless the required adherence to state standards that affects ECE teaching and learning. Administrators agree that allowing as much latitude to teachers as possible in operating their classroom is the ideal; however, any freedom and flexibility was tempered by the need to meet state standards.

The dichotomy from the findings in chapter four and five, about best practices in early childhood classrooms versus the emphasis they assign in this chapter in higher academic scores is best understood by using the lens of logic of action. The current controversy, which has endured for fifty years, between cognitive academic emphasis versus whole child approach (Ziegler, 2006) can be fully embedded as a debate between the market oriented/neoliberal/bureaucratic logic of accountability and the distributed justice/equity logic of professional autonomy.

Bacharach and Mundell illustrates how the current controversy feeds into this framework of analysis and helps us understand the relationship between goals and means, and ideology and policy. It helps us understand what motivates administrators to express their description of best practices reported in chapter four and five, and the influence they assign to the state standards and high stakes testing described in chapter six.

This controversy has an ideological interpretation, where "supporters of the ideological goal of knowledge acquisition giving the opportunity for all to compete on equal grounds to achieve economical advance" (Bacharrel & Mundell, 1987, p. 428) versus "those advocating a logic of professional autonomy" as being supporters of the ideological goal of equity, claiming that equality of opportunity is not enough- there must

be equality of results "allowing professionals the autonomy to compensate for individual differences among students to avoid treating unequals as if they were equals" (Bacharrel & Mundell, 1987, p. 428).

Summary and Reflections

In this chapter, the administrators described the external factors that influence the early childhood classroom. Two major findings emerged from their interviews, the influence they have on the classrooms and the influence of standardization and high stakes testing on early childhood classrooms.

Administrators acknowledge they have a strong influence in impacting the ECE classroom. The superintendent, central office administrators, and principals as instructional leaders, influence the ECE classroom. They do this by establishing the district's vision, exercising the necessary supervision, and fostering professional development.

The second major impact on early childhood is the current public educational environment, at all levels which operates with an awareness that failure to meet particular standards as measured by performance on the high stakes test can affect teachers in particular and schools in general. The administrators in the study agreed that the high stakes test and the consequence of failure to meet standards creates undue amount of stress among educators. As a result, creativity and freedom in teaching is stifled, yet they never acknowledged that they were the ones that directly create this stress.

Although, they noted that in the ECE environment this stress is not felt with the same intensity since the high stakes affect intermediate grades and beyond.

Administrators were willing to accept teachers' personal style but this view was always conditioned to meeting the state standards.

The dichotomy from the findings in chapter four and five, about best practices in early childhood classrooms versus the emphasis they assign in practice in higher academic scores is best understood by using the lens of logic of action. In the responses reflected in this chapter, administrators, either by their own decision or forced by the rules established by the state, follow the market oriented/neoliberal/bureaucratic logic of accountability.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions, Reflections, and Implications

In this chapter, I will reflect on the major findings from chapters four, five, and six, my reflections as an administrator of an early childhood center, and the implications of these findings that could influence different audiences, which include administrators, teachers, teacher preparation programs, and policy makers.

Administrators used the video as a stimulus to talk about student learning and the environment in early childhood classrooms. The way the teacher in the video ran her class included many of the components administrators considered should be part of a high quality ECE classroom.

Administrators' Perspectives on Student Learning and Learning Environment in Early Childhood Classrooms.

In understanding that human relationships are the building blocks of healthy learning development (Schonkoff, 2005) the administrators agreed that the way the teacher built strong relationships, teacher-student, and student-student was an important factor woven into the fabric of the classroom in the video. Strong relationships lead to a more productive classroom and are a basic support for the growth of new skills and capabilities that are within a child's reach (Schonkoff, 2005).

The administrators placed building relationships as the overarching theme component of a high-quality classroom. A fundamental support of this relationship is based on the reciprocal trust between teachers-students and students-students. The administrators placed trust as the core to building relationships.

The relationships, communication and trust that exist in the classroom merged to create a classroom culture and environment that promoted collaborative learning, where all participants shared in the process of learning.

Administrators felt that building relationships allowed the teacher to develop conflict resolution protocols to empower students to take responsibility for their actions and possess the necessary tools to problem solve.

Administrators described that a way to form strong relationships is related to focusing on student interests and offering real world experiences to the students as a way to engage their learning.

Administrators stressed the importance of giving students confidence to make choices because that expands the opportunity to become more inquisitive and increases their cognitive and socio-emotional skills.

Administrators' responses to the film revealed four important elements that administrators need to look for when they assess a high quality early childhood environment. The first is that structure is an important part of early childhood classrooms. *Structure* as described by the administrators, is a framework set forth by the teacher to establish the way a classroom functions, the process used to organize the classroom, the repetitive activities that occur in the classroom daily and the system to guide movements within the classroom. Second, the administrators strongly agree that early childhood environments should allow children the freedom to talk and move in their learning environment, and giving them the power to choose and self-direct their learning. Third, a balance of noise and constructive chaos is important for early childhood

classrooms. Finally, administrators pointed out the importance of specific physical features of the classroom, which included classroom displays, learning tools, seating arrangements, bulletin boards, and other visual elements.

The administrators' perspectives and ideas regarding the most effective ways children learn and the high quality environments in early childhood classrooms are consistent with the prevailing conceptual framework of the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

My findings revealed an optimistic and homogeneous point of view from the administrators about best practices for student learning and environments in high quality early childhood classrooms. Yet, the current literature attests that these environments and practices are not being offered to Latino immigrant students (Pas, Larson, Reinke, Herman, & Bradshaw, 2016; Colbert, 2010; Adair, 2015; Ford, 2010), and as an administrator who had visited more than 100 classrooms I was concerned because this is not what I have seen in the classrooms. There is clearly a nuance between what administrators describe as high quality early childhood environments and the actual practice. More than two decades ago studies have mentioned this dichotomy within theory and educational practice in the schools (Hatch & Freeman, 1988) and this dichotomy remains today.

During the interviews, the way administrators commented about the deficit of knowledge and skills that Latino immigrant students posses, which may erode the required trust that needs to be built between the teacher and the students.

Unconsciously, their deficit view can put into question the relationship of trust that needs to be built in schools for successful learning to occur.

At no point, did any of the administrators view the children who they worked with (immigrant Latino) as students bringing their resiliency into the classrooms. While they noted the students' characteristics as immigrant students, they did not balance that with remarks to say or imply that the students nonetheless possessed other learning abilities. What I argue is the participants' lack of acknowledgement of students' capacity is a way the deficit is implied or mentioned by the administrators, and I wonder if this is a reflection of how they act. It seems that the way they view the students' immigrant status implies a deficit and reflects on the student in a negative way (Colegrove & Adair, 2014; Licona, 2013; Gillborn, 2010; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

I argue that what is often seen as a deficit actually has merit. In the case of immigrant students, their limited English does not imply limited intellectual capacity; in fact, the challenges to learn another language, as well as the challenges to adapt to a new culture and place strengthens their resilience. The students' hardships help develop resilience. Resilience encourages tenacity and perseverance, which are two qualities that serve a student well in school performance. Immigrant students may not immediately demonstrate mastery, but as they persist to acculturate and develop resilience, their performance increases. The level of knowledge they show should not be interpreted as a deficit but rather recognized as resiliency (Nolan, Taket & Stagnitti, 2014; Sosa & Gomez, 2012; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). This interpretation implies that this is a

positive feature to build on top of the resilience to improve the learning process for immigrant students.

Throughout their interviews, there were hidden or implicit contradictions in their comments, and how their understanding of student learning and the environment in the classrooms lacked the socio-cultural strengths brought by Latino immigrant students and these were not explicitly recognized by the administrators. It appears that in their answers there was a tendency to deny cultural differences implying that the cultural practice of the dominant group are taken as the norm (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Their comments were socio-culturally neutral and reflected a lack of cultural situatedness and the dominance of the cultural free notion of best practices (Adair, 2009). It was unexpected because most of the participant in the focus groups, were themselves Latino immigrants or coming from a Latino family. In thinking of the positive influences Latino immigrant students bring to the classroom, I think of collaborative learning. In the Mesoamerican ancient cultures from where many of the immigrant families come from, collaboration and even collective behaviors constitute its unity and identity. (Diaz, 2002; Pas et al., 2016; Rogoff, 1994; Wagner, 2002).

Vygotsky (Cole, 1996) indicates that the human environment takes root from the prior generations which have left material or immaterial reference of their activities (Molle-Chamoux, 2015). The learning practices of the ancient MesoAmerican cultures, has as their central belief many important components of what is described today as the

best developmental learning practices (Molle-Chamoux, 2015). For example, learning needs to be student centered; the teacher cannot insert knowledge by themselves. They provide guidance, organize good conditions of apprenticeship, indicate the direction and the goal, serve as a model and protect the learner. Learning in these societies is based on observing the reality of the child by developing attentive engagement and not preventing children to try as well as persuade children to be responsible and adopt a calm attitude for paying attention (Molle-Chamoux, 20015; Rogoff, 1994).

But I argue that the dominant discourse in the schools in the United States tend to favor competitiveness vs collaboration. The standardization in schools proves the nature of competitiveness (Salinas & Reidel, 2007).

Administrators Perspectives on Influential Factors on Early Learning

In chapter six, the administrators described the external factors that influence the early childhood classroom. Two major findings emerged from their interviews, the influence they have on the classrooms and the influence of standardization and high stakes testing on early childhood classrooms.

Administrators acknowledge they had a strong influence in impacting the ECE classroom. They do this by establishing the district's vision, exercising the necessary supervision, and fostering professional development.

The second major impact on early childhood is the current public educational environment, at all levels which operates with an awareness that failure to meet particular standards as measured by performance on the high stakes test can affect teachers in particular and schools in general. The administrators in the study agreed that the high

stakes test and the consequence of failure to meet standards creates undue amount of stress among educators. As a result, creativity and freedom in teaching is stifled yet they never acknowledged that they were the ones that directly create this stress.

Although, they noted that in early childhood this stress is not felt with the same intensity since the high stakes affect intermediate grades and beyond. Administrators were willing to accept teachers' personal style but this view was always conditioned to meeting the state standards.

The dichotomy from the findings in chapter four and five, about best practices in early childhood classrooms versus the emphasis they assign in practice to meeting standards and higher academic scores is best understood by using the lens of logic of action. In the responses reflected in this chapter, administrators, either by their own decision or forced by the rules established by the state, follow the market oriented/neoliberal/bureaucratic logic of accountability.

My reflections

To put myself in this discussion, I want to share my story as an administrator because I have learned that an important part of our job is reflecting on one's own practice. As an administrator I want to recognize that we have the power to offer these learning spaces to Latino immigrant children. My practices have been influences by my experiences as a teacher and a student at the University of Texas.

My intention in sharing my story is to include some of the findings that surfaced from my study intertwining them in how I incorporate these practices on a daily basis in my work as an administrator.

When I was teaching, I wanted my classroom to be a special place for my students. I wanted my classroom to be unique and attractive to have a homey and welcoming appeal. I decorated with plants and used lamps to enhance the homey aesthetic. I included lots of detail throughout the classroom, which regularly included classical background music. The learning environment was important.

The students felt special, that being a part of my classroom, our learning community was a special opportunity. Beyond their desire to come to school was my goal to instill in them a desire to go as far as they could. One thing I did each year was take a photo of each student in a cap and gown, which served to encourage and remind them that one day graduation would be their experience—they could do it. Building relationships with the students and letting them know that I believed in them was important.

My principal was clear on her expectations, and was always available to offer counsel and advice. However, she essentially left me alone to be resourceful and meet her expectations, which was student growth. I was left alone to do in my classroom as I saw fit. I took my responsibility very seriously, but I also knew I did not just want my students to pass a high stakes test, which they always did. I wanted my students to be able to be good thinkers and problem solvers and to take responsibility for their own

learning. I wanted them to enjoy learning and to develop skills and habits that would serve them well not only for school but for life.

These experiences influenced me as a principal as I work to encourage and coach teachers to create an environment where students feel welcome, accepted, and respected. Students must enter a room and feel they are in a special place. I believe this starts with a clean and orderly classroom. I want classrooms to be filled with natural light, for example, and I hold conversations with teachers regarding how such a detail creates an inviting aesthetic. Teachers are strongly encouraged to experiment with arranging their classrooms in ways that will allow students freedom of movement, as well as provide creative and flexible learning spaces.

In the same way, a classroom is to be welcoming and make students and families feel they are entering a special place, I believe the same goes for the school's common areas and external environment. It does not matter how our parents choose to dress or live or that many of our students are children of poverty. It matters that when anyone arrives at the school they are treated with respect and dignity. My understanding of parents was strongly influenced from what I learned as a student at UT.

The way the front lawn is maintained and the grounds kept free of debris demonstrates to everyone that we care, and only the best will do for the children. I believe the school hallways should be student-centered. We have interactive learning walls so the children have freedom to move their hands and touch their surroundings. When students are in line waiting their turn for the restroom, there must be books and other eye catching and enticing displays. Children don't have to walk in straight lines. I

encourage "herding" where the children walk freely down the halls. One thing though, the halls are never quiet. The children sing when they are walking down the hallways. Noise and constructive chaos is important.

Every detail of the school environment must convey the message, "they [students] are so important, we are going to do everything in our power to make it perfect, and they should not expect anything less." I tell people we are creating a little piece of heaven for our students. This is an important part of building relationships.

The administrator's role. As an administrator, I work to create an attitude and environment in the school the same as I did as a teacher. I am taking my experience as a teacher and using it as a template to apply to all areas of the school. In a sense, I am still a teacher. I am teaching teachers a new pedagogy--what it looks like and how do we make it happen at our school. I am articulating standards of what marks success, and providing benchmarks for measuring progress. I am known to be strict, but only when it comes to how we treat one another, our students, and our parents. In other words, as long as I witness that teachers are engaging students through this new paradigm, I keep my distance. For those who may not be fit for this environment, it's my job to coach them to consider alternatives. Not every teacher is *cut out* to work in this environment, and that is okay.

It is my role to instill in the community the value of education. It has the power to transform lives. I know this through personal experience. I see what education did for my own father. My father came from modest means and had to work himself through school. He did not enjoy the same privileges as his classmates, yet knew he was smart,

and had the tenacity to succeed, to the point of earning a Ph.D. As a doctoral student, I have been opened up to new ideas and information, so I know firsthand that learning continues. I believe it is now my turn to carry this forward, a sort of domino effect, and empower teachers and students to aspire to higher educational attainment.

It all begins in relationship. Everything I do, everything I expect from the teachers and staff, and everything I hope for the students and families begins with our relationship with one another. I have had parents of former students tell me about their child's success, which they attribute to the hunger for learning and belief I instilled in their child. The mother of a girl, who I used to call "Doctor Dominique" informed me that Dominique is now a junior in medical school.

That is why it is so important for me to witness teachers engaging with their students and parents in such a way that demonstrates a special bond between student and teacher. For example, I will never forget the time I was walking behind a teacher, who did not know I was there, and as one of her students approached, the teacher squatted down with open arms to welcome the student and said, "I am so glad you are here." There is no doubt in my mind that child will never forget how that teacher made her feel, and the side effects of that bond is having a student who will want to come to school, will enjoy school, and will see education as a good thing for the rest of her life.

The teachers I work with overwhelmingly agree with our school's philosophy, and are essential to further developing our unique school culture. Even those who may not fully agree with our way of operating, and may be more traditional in their preference, we still nonetheless get along. The way we respect and relate to one another

is a non-negotiable. The respect, the sincere desire to bring out the best in teachers and staff, is a universally held belief at the school. And, it is the cornerstone of what makes the school as special as we believe it to be. It's all about the principal-to-teacher relationships and the teacher-to-student relationships.

As an administrator, I have been faced with the challenges of speaking up to the Early Childhood Director who wanted to push a boxed curriculum. My position as a student at the UT gave me the voice to challenge this decision. As a result, I was able to speak to the superintendent who allowed me to be the instructional leader of my campus. I believe that his willingness to listen is because I can articulate why a paradigm shift is important for early childhood. I can do this because of what I have learned at the university and because of all the experiences that come along with being a student at UT. This past week, the superintendent approved to grow my school from a Prek (3&4) year old school to a K-3 school. We will begin this project next year as an in-district charter.

Implications of this study

Implication 1. There are two main types of administration styles in school leadership: curriculum focused and managerial. School administrators often specialize in one of these styles in terms of how they manage their respective schools and teachers (Simonsen & Wally, 2010). In their answers, administrators acknowledged the importance of their role as instructional leaders. Although it is important to draw upon both styles to come up with a holistic system for early childhood education in their respective schools, mid-management certification programs for administrators and principals place emphasis on the managerial component of running the organization

versus a focus on curriculum and instruction. Principal preparation programs need to include more emphasis on the principal's role as instructional leaders and include early childhood education as part of the program's curriculum (Goffin & Janke, 2013; Jor'dan et al., 2013).

There is also a need for administrators to maintain a positive relationship with local universities and related research institutions. Such relationships will allow administrators to remain current on the latest research regarding early childhood education; additionally, this will introduce administrators to the latest trends and best practices in early childhood education. Keeping abreast of the latest research and pedagogical developments will, thereby, provide administrators with the best information as they prepare relevant professional development, and pertinent curriculum and instruction and also this will provide the administrators the necessary tools to explain to the school board why these practices should be implemented in their schools and give them more freedom to implement these practices.

Implication 2. According to the administrators, early childhood learning environments are most effective when teachers make learning relevant to students' experience, academic abilities, life circumstances, and their own interest. This perspective indicates that lesson preparation and curriculum development should be done with real world experiences and the students' interests in mind (Henderson, Sabbagh, & Woodward, 2013). Given the variety of situations and experiences, children have within a district, it is difficult to see in one program or boxed curriculum that will meet the needs of each individual classroom. It is more reasonable, with given guidelines that each

principal along with the teachers, creates the curriculum based on the specific needs of each classroom in a school. This gives principals and teachers the freedom, within certain limits, to establish the contents (what), the time (when), the methodology (how) and the space (where). If teachers and principals are to formulate the curriculum in each school according to the students' interests and characteristics it makes them more involved and fully participative in the learning program since they have ownership of what they have created (Tarchi & Pinto, 2013). The implication to the school districts is to consider investing more on human capital vs. investing on commercial boxed curriculum (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010; Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2010.

Implication 3. In understanding that human relationships are the building blocks of healthy learning development (Schonkoff, 2005) administrators placed relationships as the most important factor woven into the fabric of a classroom. As Schonkoff states, socio-emotional development is just as important as the components that enhance cognitive competence. Another major implication is the importance for building strong relationships and understanding the socio-emotional component of learning in early childhood (Breeman et al., 2015; Linvill, 2014). There is a need for administrators to provide a vision in their districts and schools that emphasize the development of relationships and socio-emotional component of learning. Administrators need to enhance, in the professional development, the know- how of building relationships with students and the effects of targeting socio-emotional skills. Universities need to include classes on psychology in teacher preparation programs for future teachers.

Implication 4. The freedom for students to talk, to ask questions, to move freely around their space, to interact in an environment that is fun require certain abilities from the teacher to understand that structure is necessary in the classroom to allow students to move around in a non-traditional way (Killen, Ardilla-Ray, Barakkatz, & Wang, 2000; Vestal & Jones, 2004). Children participation is better understood as the student-teacher relation and the spaces that get constructed and improved (Mannion,2007). Administrators need to favor the emergence of spaces that foster the teacher-student, student-student relations like outdoor spaces, yoga rooms, and theaters. All these examples are an excellent way to address the spatial, dialogical, and intergenerational aspects of children's participation (Mannion, 2007). It is important to highlight that administrators need to provide the required funding for schools to create these spaces.

What is most important is that administrators need to have a different lens when they enter these classrooms where the students might not be necessarily working on academic skills and not be punitive to the teachers for fostering socio-emotional skills.

Implication 5 The dichotomy from the findings in chapter four and five versus the emphasis administrators assign in practice to the market oriented/neoliberal/bureaucratic logic of accountability is the object of next implication. To better understand the sense of this implication I want to start by making some clarifications that I consider important.

There is a tendency in the literature to use certain terms and associate them to the market oriented/neoliberal/bureaucratic logic of accountability. For example, the logic of

accountability implies a "rigorous" method of assessment and accountability. Does that mean that the logic of distributive justice does not use rigorous assessment and accountability? I would disagree. In fact, assessments are important to measure the child's growth in learning. It is the type of assessments that are currently being used to compare students, schools, and districts that must be reconsidered. The conceptual act by which two different things are made the same (De Lissovoy, 2000). What the logic of distributive justice disagrees with is to equate a series of equations that have never been empirically verified (learning = absorption of testable materials; standardized testing = authentic assessment; accountability = standardized testing) as being an appropriate learning assessment (DeLissovoy & McLaren, 2006).

What is not appropriate to evaluate students is the use of assessments based on false premises and to base accountability on standardization that compares students, schools, and districts using the wrong parameters. The development of each learner is different and all aspects of education must specifically cater to the pace of each child. The assessment methods must therefore be carefully crafted based on the progress of each child. Consequently, the accountability must be based on the progress achieved by each child, school, and district (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Haynes & Zacarian, 2010.

After reviewing the Prekindergarten Guidelines and comparing them with the K-3 TEKS, I observed that the Pre-Kindergarten guidelines give weight to the development of cognitive and socio-emotional skills but the K-3 TEKS completely excludes them from the framework. Is it reasonable to think that the development of these skills stop at age

4? Is this not something that policy makers need to understand as continuing to develop into the older grades? Is it not more reasonable to merge both guidelines and give appropriate weight to both cognitive and socio-emotional skills?

Given the importance of development of correct assessments for early childhood education it is important to foster research in universities of psychologists, neuroscientists, and educators to confront the difficult task of the development of these assessments (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012).

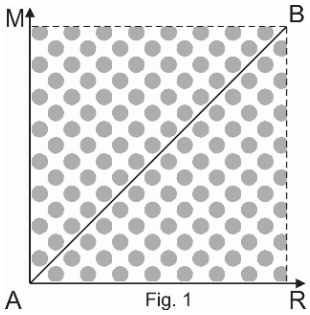
My stance in the following implication is that an improved method of assessment is an advance conducive to establish what is described as best practices in chapter four and five. I argue that when you have methods to measure and evaluate correctly both the cognitive and socio-emotional skills this will debunk the argument from policy makers to focus only on knowledge based assessments. By doing this, it will open the opportunity for administrators to focus on aspects other than knowledge based skills.

Implication 6. Concurrently with developing the correct assessment, it is important to develop a concrete representation so that administrators and practitioners can have a model to grasp the concept of an integral learning process (Killen, Ardilla-Ray, Barakkatz, & Wang, 2000; Vestal & Jones, 2004).

I explain figuratively that the learning process is like traveling in a forest (see Figure 1) where the student is moving from the neighborhood of point A to the neighborhood of point B). In Figure 1 reading is represented in the X axis and math in the Y axis. In the existing evaluation system, at each period of time a certain value of

reading and writing is fixed which implies that the process of learning is forced to be in a straight line.

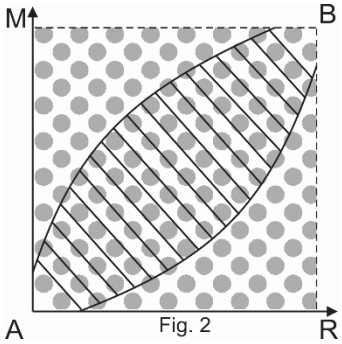
Figure 1. Learning Forest



My argument is that children with different initial knowledge, different interest, and different willingness to learn, when given the opportunity to freely travel in this forest from neighborhood A to neighborhood B, can choose their preferred route not being necessarily in a straight line. The development of a child then develops on an individual pathway (Schonkoff, 2005).

Clearly, children travel in this learning process under certain structure and guidance given by the teacher, represented by the concaved area in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Individual Pathway



I argue that instead of measuring a specific number for reading (for example x number of words in reading) or a specific number for math (x number of knowledge of numbers) what I have, as seen in fig 3, is a set of what I call isolearning curves. For example, in Fig 3 student A learning position is M(A) in math and T(A) for reading. Student B is M(B) in math and T(B) for reading. Student A is more advanced than student B in math but student B is more advanced in reading than math.

Figure 3. Two-Dimensional Plane

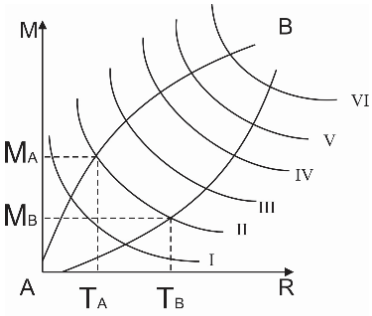


Fig. 3

In this example, both are on the same isolearning curve and growth or advancement in learning is measured as student A and B travel from isolearning curve I into equal or higher curves.

To explain this concept, I use 2 dimensions: reading and math. Clearly, it is possible to move from 2 dimensions to 3 dimensions. As an example, I use reading, math and science. Instead of a 2-dimensional plane, like fig 1,2,3. Now we have a 3 dimensional space like in fig 4. The concept of isolearning curve is now transformed into the concept of isolearning space. Again, the restrictions and guidance shown in fig 2, where the teacher delineates the learning space, must apply here in fig 4. The learning

process is not only the acquisition of knowledge (contents) but also the development of the thinking skills and the shaping of socio-emotional skills. This vision of learning is a way to describe conceptually the common quote in education literature that you need to "look at the child in her entirety" or as the neuroscientist mention as the "whole brain child".

Figure 4. Whole Brain Child

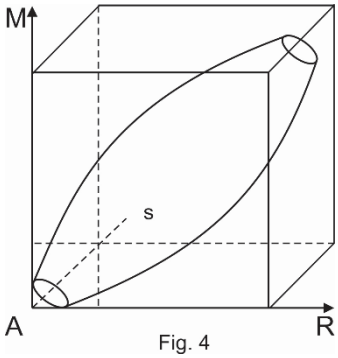


Fig. 4

I understand that the development of these concepts and its measurements are difficult, yet not an impossible task to reach.

Implication 7. Pressure from the state standards does not occur until 3rd grade, administrators need to take a risk to allow teachers to create these environments (Aubrey, Godfrey, and Harris, 2012). What better place to take the risk then in the early childhood grades (PK-3)? The most important reason is that the greatest amount of growth the human brain has in her entire life is in the early childhood grades (age 3-5) so that the focus on cognitive and socio-emotional skills should be the spotlight (Neumann & Bennett, 2001; Norris, 2010).

Final Thoughts

After conducting my study and bringing all the voices and perspectives together I realized that administrators, by and large, share common ideas on what characterizes a high quality early childhood classroom environment. I realized that for all of us, no matter how articulate we may be in identifying and describing a high quality early childhood environment, there remains a lack in attitudes and practices that challenges us to push for an authentic paradigm shift—having our words match attitudes and practices. It's not adequate to offer a politically correct response; the challenge is to truly embrace what it means to be an educational leader.

It is my hope that with this study administrators reflect on their own practice and acknowledge that there is always room for growth. Finally, that they recognize they hold the most power in creating this paradigm shift, in offering the best learning environment for Latino immigrant students.

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